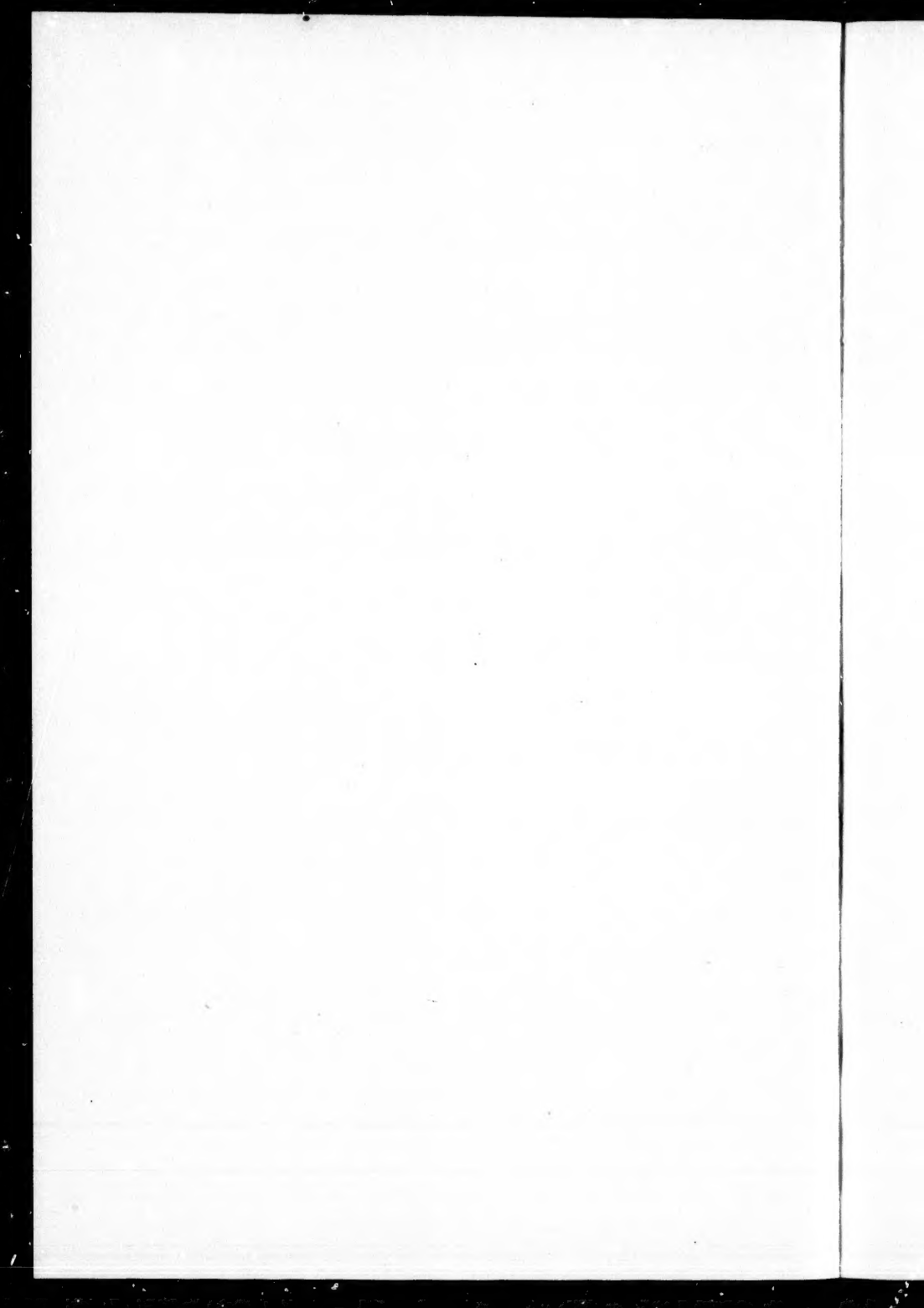
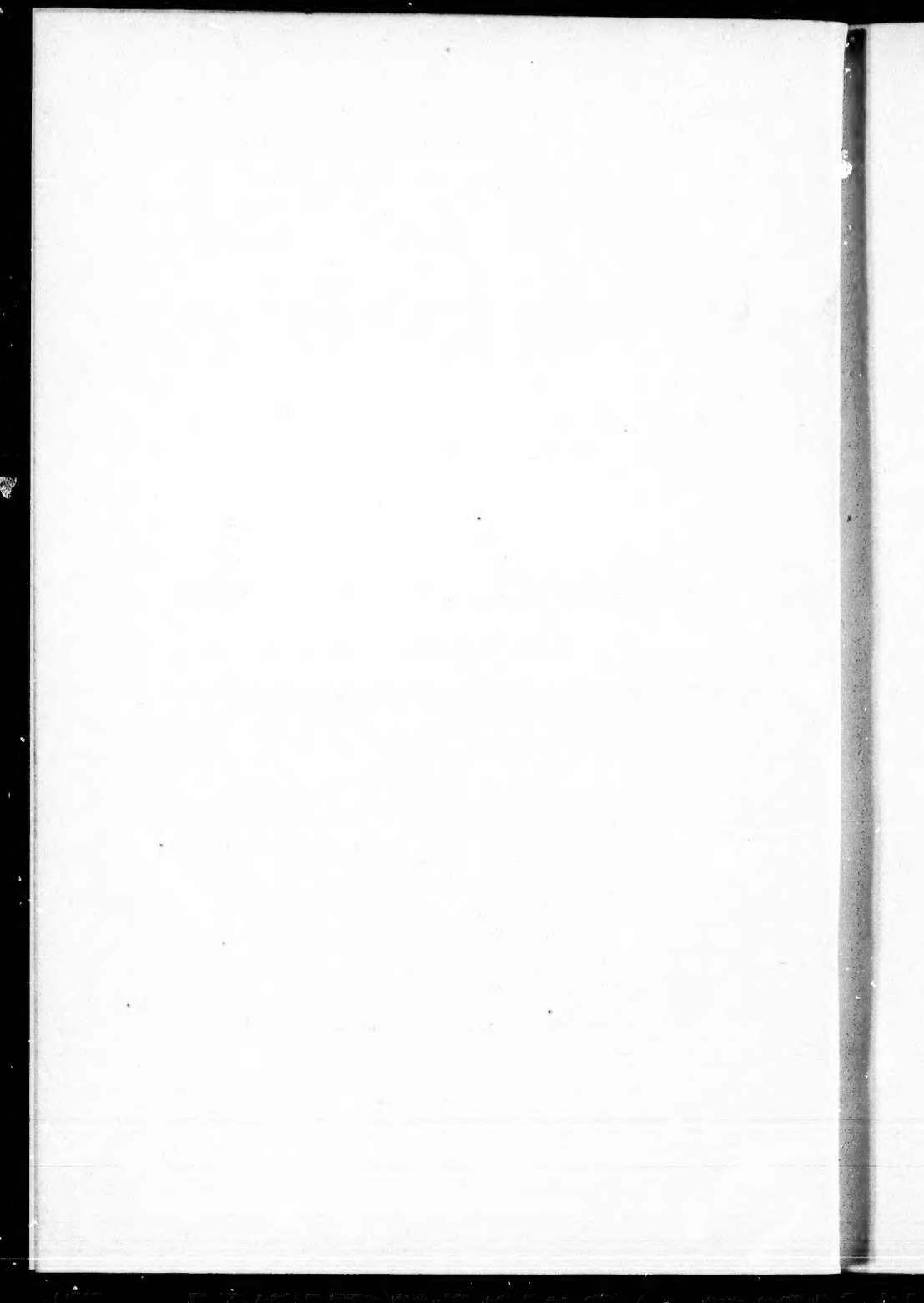




THE CREDIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY
AND THE
DIFFICULTIES OF DISBELIEF.



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THE
Credibility of Christianity
AND THE
Difficulties of Disbelief.

BY

CAPTAIN MOLONY
(ROYAL ENGINEERS).

Being a series of Six Addresses prepared for delivery in St.
Paul's Church, Halifax, N.S., and read there by the
Rev. Dyson Hague, M.A., and others.



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PREFATORY NOTE.

A brief note explaining one or two facts about these addresses will be very interesting to the reader.

Just before Lent I suggested to my friend, Captain Molony, that it would be a good thing to have a layman give a series of addresses on Sunday afternoons during Lent in the church, and, to my great delight, he consented himself to do this. It was arranged that the addresses should be given in the nave of St. Paul's Church, and that, after a brief prayer by one of the clergy, Captain Molony should proceed with his lecture or address on the evidences of the Christian faith. Accordingly, on the Sunday afternoon of February 19th, in the presence of a very large and appreciative congregation, the first lecture was delivered, and the subject for the following Sunday announced.

Then a strange thing happened.

To the amazement, not only of Captain Molony, but of nearly all the Christian community, orders came from the General in command of the British forces in Canada *forbidding him to deliver any more of the addresses*; and though representations were made to the military authorities that they were being delivered under sanction of the rector of the church in an authorized manner, and were entirely devoid of the element of controversy, the authorities were inexorable, and Captain Molony felt it to be his duty to comply with the command, and discontinue delivering the addresses in person. I felt, however, that it would be a great pity to deprive the Christian public of the benefit of hearing the rest of the addresses, notwithstanding the fact that their author was restrained from delivering them; so I waited upon the General, and received from him the assurance that it would not be considered an act of military disobedience on Captain Molony's part if the addresses were written by him, and read by another in the church.

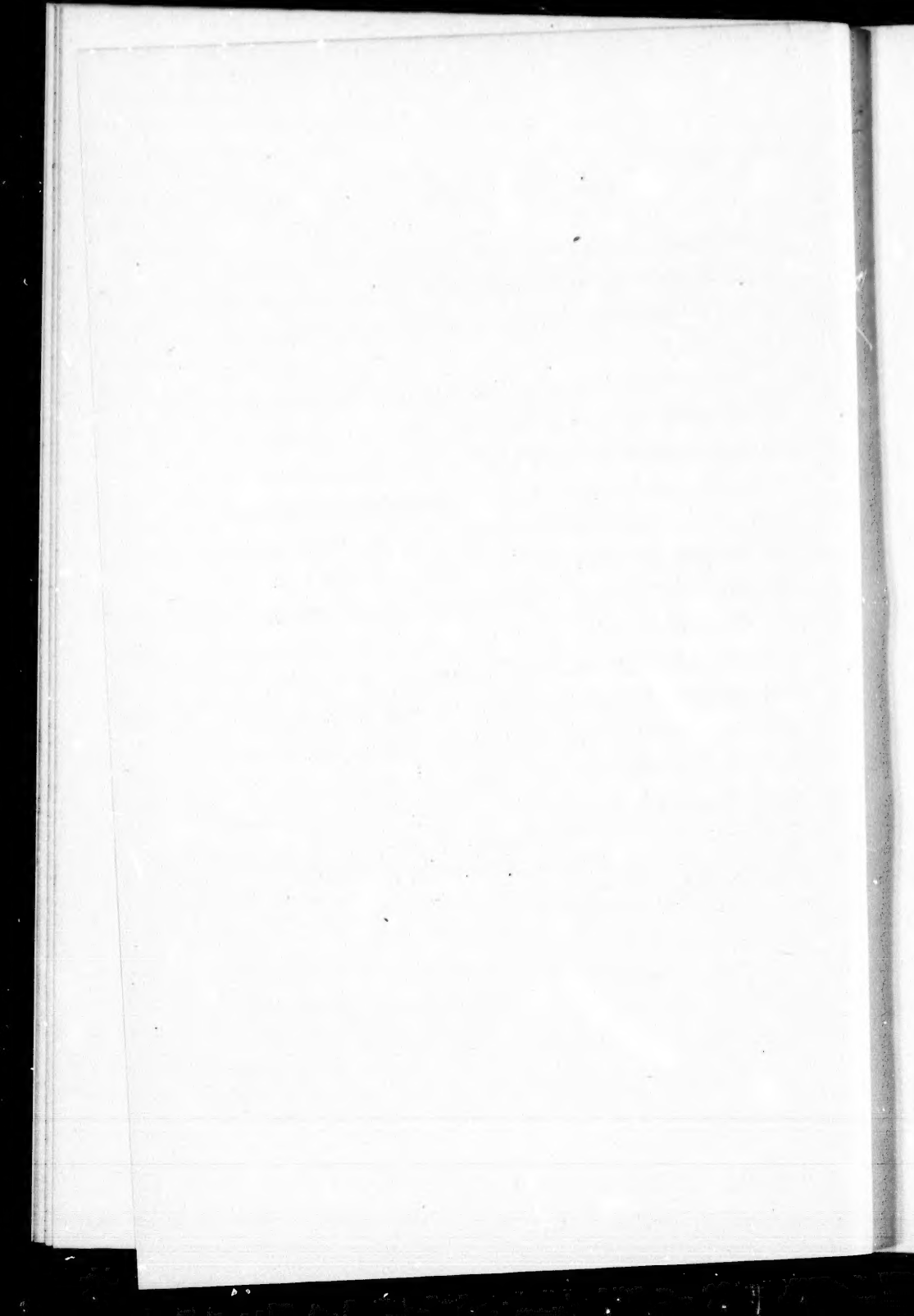
On the following Sunday afternoons, accordingly, during Lent, the rest of the addresses

were read by myself and others; and, by request, they are now published in book form in order that they may have a still wider influence.

I most heartily recommend them. In these days, when so many imagine that it is only professionalism and the loaves and fishes that make the clergy such ardent defenders of the faith, it is a good thing to find a layman coming out to plead with men of reason on behalf of the faith of Christ. His words should have weight. They will carry weight, I am sure, with all who will read his argument with care and prayer; for their author is not only an efficient officer in Her Majesty's service, but a faithful follower of the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

DYSON HAGUE,

Rector of St. Paul's Church, Halifax, N.S.
HALIFAX, August 1st, 1893.





The Credibility of Christianity and the
Difficulties of Disbelief.



ADDRESS NO. I.
INTRODUCTORY.



INTRODUCTORY.

OF late years infidelity has been allowed to scatter its doctrines broadcast among the people. It aims at undermining and destroying the whole Christian system; and thus it has now become absolutely necessary that every Christian should know what foundations his faith rests upon. It is not sufficient to say that we feel instinctively that the Bible, which is, and always will remain, the great foundation for our faith—it is not enough to trust our intuition that this wonderful book is from God; because this is an age of reason and argument. Those of us who can trace God's providential care in guiding our own lives, and His answers to prayer, are only too apt to forget these proofs of His existence and love to us; and if we allege that we feel the working of God's Holy Spirit in our own hearts, the world calls trust in such feeling foolishness, whereas if we say that we may well be content to believe what thousands have believed before us, we are told that we are going astray like a flock of stupid sheep. In a word, the world will listen to nothing but hard logic, and, as the Almighty has given us

abundant logical reasons for believing in His existence and love to us, it is important that we should understand some of these reasons thoroughly.

Most Christians feel a natural reluctance to examine the foundations of their faith. The very inquiry seems to be doubting God, and thus dishonouring to Him. But there are many passages in Scripture which disprove this view. St. Luke praised the Bereans for "searching the Scriptures daily whether those things were so." Now the only Scriptures which the Bereans possessed were those of the Old Testament, and the natural explanation of the passage is, that they were praised for searching the Scriptures to verify the existence of those prophecies that St. Paul claimed were fulfilled in Christ; that is, they were praised for examining the foundations of their faith. Now, with regard to these prophecies themselves—especially those of details of the crucifixion, which teach no doctrine or morals—how are we to account for their existence in the Bible, except on the supposition that the Almighty caused them to be written to prove the truth of the revelation He was making? There are many passages all through Scripture which have only an evidential value—mentions of names, places, and occurrences of no special

importance; recapitulations of speeches and events of Christ's appearances, as in I. Cor. xv., etc. These teach us nothing, either about spiritual things or about our own lives, and we must therefore presume that they are placed in the Bible to fulfil a purpose for which they are excellently adapted, namely, to establish the genuine character of the book, and the reality of God's revelation to man.

We are thus led to conclude that this inquiry is certainly right and well-pleasing to God. Now, is it advisable, not to say necessary? I said that infidelity is scattering its doctrines broadcast. It has also gained for itself a public hearing; I propose to show how.

Lectures on the subject are delivered in many of our large towns, sometimes under deceptive names. One evening I saw a lecture advertised on "Has Christianity Tended to Progress?" I thought there could be but one answer to such a question, that the lecturer *must* be favourable to Christianity, and went to hear him. I heard an out and out infidel lecture, very little of which was *apropos* to the subject. In the same way books are published, and largely sold, with very high-sounding, elevating titles, but of a most seductive, faith-destroying nature. Their titles are such as would lead any one to suppose that it would do

one good to read them ; like poisonous berries, they are outwardly beautiful, even the language being often unexceptional, but when read and mentally digested they prove deadly. There is nothing sadder than to see such books in the hands of persons for whom one has a high regard. It is like seeing them eat fungi. Again, infidelity is allowed to air its various views in our high-class magazines. Many of the articles in our standard newspapers are written by men with an evidently skeptical turn of mind. Infidel tracts are left about in our post offices and other places of public resort, and its tenets of despair are often preached from the pulpits of nominally Christian churches. Thus people of all ages, sexes, and classes of the community must expect to have these infidel teachings obtruded upon their notice. How are we prepared to refute such teaching, and maintain our faith inviolate ?

It must be acknowledged that most people are utterly unprepared, except by a slight general knowledge of Scripture and the teachings of their particular church. Many of the greatest thinkers of Europe have been racking their brains to find objections to Christianity. Some of these objections are on the tongues of all their followers. How few there are who know how to meet them ! If a man studies the argu-

ments on one side of a question, and nothing but the bare facts on the other side, the arguments are almost certain to carry the day; yet most Christians, only knowing the facts of Scripture, and not how these facts can be used as arguments, imagine that their knowledge is sufficient to meet the specious reasonings of unbelievers, and that it is want of faith if they are not willing at all times to enter into the combat with this poor equipment. They say, "I like to hear both sides of a question," and consequently read argumentative infidel books, without examining the arguments on the Christian side at all. These latter are so numerous and varied that, had they been better known, there is no doubt infidelity would never have obtained the hold upon the public mind which it now possesses. But before examining the arguments pro and con, let me beg you to constantly remember the disadvantages under which Christianity labours in maintaining its position. Infidelity is hydra-headed, and every head assumes a different form.

First, there is the Materialist, who maintains that there is nothing but matter in the whole universe, and that mind itself is but a form of matter; then the Atheist, who states that there is no God. Such are generally materialistic evolutionists; that is, they maintain

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that the whole universe was evolved out of matter, without the assistance of any directing mind or God. The theory of evolution is absolutely essential to their faith ; without it, their views would be altogether irrational. (On the other hand, it may be here mentioned that the theory of evolution is not necessarily antagonistic to the Christian faith.) Then there are the Pantheists, who believe that all nature is God ; such are the modern Hindus. The Buddhists, Theosophists, and Spiritualists may almost be called pantheists. Deists are those who believe in one God, but that He has never made a revelation to man. Theists believe that He has made such a revelation. The Mahometans are therefore theists, believing, as they do, that God revealed Himself in much of the Old Testament, and by Mahomet. Christians are theists, believing that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament and by Christ. So are Jews, who, however, still reject Christ as an impostor ; while Unitarians would not describe Him as such, but deny that He was God, while admitting that He was sent by God. The above may be called a graduation from utter unbelief up to Christianity. There are some other forms of unbelief which, however, cannot well be classified.

Agnosticism allows that there may be, and

probably is, a God, but, for metaphysical reasons, we can never know anything about Him. Some Christians deride them by calling them self-confessed ignoramuses. It seems a pity to set an example of introducing scoffing into a discussion on so vital a matter as religion, without which we should have "no hope in the world." In such a matter surely ridicule should at least be reserved for an opponent who flatly contradicts himself, or the common principles of reasoning.

Freethinkers and Rationalists are names which have been usurped by infidels, and to which their systems have no exclusive right. It seems to me that any man whose circumstances do not predispose him to any one form of belief is a "freethinker." Many Christian laymen have just as good a right to the title as unbelievers. If a man who is surrounded by infidels chooses to break with their notions and believe in Christ, he presumably does so from the pure convictions of an unfettered mind, and may claim to be called a freethinker. The rationalist only accepts reason for his guide. But if, on examining the Scriptures, he finds good reason for believing them to be the Word of God, and, further, his reason tells him that God's thoughts are higher than man's, and therefore it would be unreasonable to ex-

pect to understand all His purposes—if thus his reason leads him to believe the Bible, why may he not still be called a rationalist? The fact is, infidelity assumes that every one who is free to believe as he likes must necessarily doubt the Bible, and every one who trusts his reason must come to the conclusion that there is no reasoning power greater than his own.

Skeptic is too general a term to define, unless it be taken to mean a man who doubts everything, but positively denies nothing.

Now, it is a remarkable fact that these various systems of infidelity can and do fraternize among themselves, but all unite in opposing Christianity. Have you ever heard of the English agnostics sending men to overthrow the Mahometan faith? or the Mahometans sending emissaries to teach Islamism in China? or the civilized Japanese sending missionaries to the barbarians in Central Africa? On the other hand, you will constantly hear Englishmen who have been in India, though of a skeptical turn of mind themselves, praise eastern religions indiscriminately. It is not mere toleration which these creeds show to one another; they are actively co-operating, for “in the year 1880 a mixed delegation of Hindus and Parsees were deputed by the Bombay branch of the Theosophical Society to assist the founders in

organizing Buddhist branches in Ceylon. In 1881, the Buddhists reciprocated by sending over delegates to Tinnevely to assist in organizing a Hindu branch, and these Buddhists were, together with Colonel Olcott (a Theosophist), received with rapturous welcome, inside a most sacred Hindu temple." Pember also states: "A recent catalogue of the Psychological Press Association (spiritualistic) presents a list of some four or five hundred works, among which may be found vigorous attacks on the Christian faith, from every conceivable quarter. The greatest number of assailants seem, however, to be either Buddhists or Agnostics." Here, again, we see three distinct systems co-operating, and doing so to attack Christianity.

We have seen in how many ways the various infidel systems are assailing Christianity in our own land. But foreign systems are also gaining entrance, with the object of destroying Christianity—for instance, Theosophy and Mahometanism. Now, if you saw all the boys in a school uniting to attack one unfortunate youth, what would you infer? Either that the majority were good and the one bad, or the majority in the wrong and the one in the right. Now, the majority of religions in the world cannot be in the right, for their teachings are utterly contradictory. Hence the fact that

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they unite in combating Christianity gives us a presumption at starting that Christianity is the one true system.

The fact that they occasionally offer to ally themselves with Christianity in no way damages the force of this argument. For, if the majority in our school offered to make friends with the one dissentient, we should feel all the more sure that he alone was in the right. A. P. Linnett, in *The Occult World*, writes of the identification of the occult system with the doctrines of the initiated organizations in all ages of the world's history. "Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and the Egyptian theology are thus brought into one family of ideas. They who seek to wed Buddha to Jesus are of the celestial and upper, and they who interpose to forbid the banns of the astral and nether; between the two hemispheres stand the domain and faith of Islam—not to divide, but to unite them." Thus it will be seen that this federation of other systems does seek to be allied to Christianity.

Suppose A. wishes to enter into partnership with B., who will not agree to the proposal; and suppose that, having an opportunity of examining their capital, you find that the bank notes of A. and B. are different, though they are both supposed to come from the one bank.

You would immediately guess that one set of notes were spurious, and that A., knowing his own notes to be worthless, naturally wished to trade with B.'s good ones. For a similar reason, we infer that these false systems desire to be allied to Christianity in order that they may trade with its sound doctrines. Here, again, we have a presumption that Christianity is the one true system. Nothing can vitiate this reasoning unless Christianity seeks to be allied to these false systems. May God forbid such a catastrophe!

But, to return to our subject, it will be at once seen that the multiplicity of these systems immediately puts Christianity at a disadvantage in argument with infidelity. Christianity is like one of the fortified towns besieged by the Prussians in 1870, and surrounded by a number of hidden and scattered batteries. If the shells fired from these batteries did not hit their exact object, they were pretty sure to do damage somewhere in the fortress. If the shells fired in reply from the town missed their mark, they were wasted. The fortress was a definite, conspicuous target; the siege batteries vague, indefinite, almost invisible. In the same way Christianity must be definite, and formulate creeds for purposes of defence against internal error, and must scatter its replies over

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the whole area of infidel argument. If only it could concentrate on one form of infidelity at a time, there is no doubt that it could crush the present forms of skepticism as easily as it has out-reasoned past forms of unbelief.

And here we must do our opponents the justice to allow that they are wonderfully good at the military manœuvre of "changing front." No crack regiment in Her Majesty's army has performed this evolution in action so well or so often.

For instance, Lucian, about A.D. 170, objected to Christianity because of the fortitude which Christians showed under martyrdom! because of their brotherly love for each other! and because they lived according to the laws of Christ!—which everybody has long acknowledged are the most beautiful rules of life ever put before the world. Celsus, the next objector, about A.D. 180, imputes our Saviour's miracles to magic, thus admitting that people then generally believed in them; attacks His divinity, and concentrates the bitterest raillery on the affecting narrative of our blessed Lord's passion (B. II., 21, 24), which even skeptics now universally acknowledge to be the noblest example of fortitude the world has ever seen. Further, Celsus reproaches the Christians with their carefulness to proselytize the poor, and to

convert the vicious (B. III., 44, 50, 59, 62, 74). Every modern philosopher acknowledges that these are duties of society. Porphyry, A.D. 270, took exception to the mention of the dispute between St. Peter and St. Paul, as an instance of the admixture of human ingredients in the body of apostolic teaching. Nowadays we consider the mention of apostolic failings as a proof of genuineness. Next, Hierocles, A.D. 303, endeavoured to develop the character of Apollonius of Tyana as a rival to our Saviour in miraculous power. Now, it is only Christianity which keeps alive the memory of this Apollonius among a few learned men, while Christ's name lives on the lips of millions.

Porphyry and Julian (the apostate) both brought forward many of the arguments against the truth of Christianity which are adduced at the present day. Nevertheless, the truth of Christianity prevailed; infidelity died out among civilized nations; but then, unfortunately, the church sank into deadly formalism.

With the Reformation, infidelity again awoke, but at first took no very definite forms. Then came Voltaire, who denied the literary and monumental value of the Bible, and the moral influence of Christianity. Now, no thinking skeptic would deny the literary beauty of the Bible; nor could he deny its historic value,

for it has been too well proved by the deciphering of old inscriptions, etc. Neither—since our missionaries have been the means of attaining such wonderful success in Madagascar, Uganda, and the islands of the Pacific—can any one deny the moral influence for good of Christianity.

Thomas Paine ascribed Christianity to imposture; but Paley has so well shown that it is absurd to believe that men who gave up wealth, comfort, and even life, for the sake of telling men of Christ, and saying, "Lie not one to another"—it is so absurd to believe that such men were impostors that even skeptics have dropped the allegation.

The German, Paulus, explained the resurrection by declaring that the death of our Lord was only apparent. The French skeptic, Renan, declares that "they," that is, the Jews, "must at all events have made certain that He was really dead." Strauss, in his "Leben Jesu," was unable to see the personality and originality of the sacred character which is the subject of his study; while Renan criticizes him for this want of insight.

Thus we see that unbelievers have been continually changing their minds as to what they should put forward as the alleged main fault or defect of Christianity. And we can-

not help feeling certain that, had there been any real and vital fault or defect, unbelievers would have so perseveringly advanced it as a reason for condemning the whole system that Christianity would, long ago, have been consigned to oblivion.

"Oh, but," skeptics say, "if infidelity has been continually changing its front, so has Christianity. Did not most Christians once maintain that every word in the Bible was absolutely accurate? and now do they not allow that there are many insertions, alterations, and different readings of the text? Were not Christians once positive that the world was created in six days of twenty-four hours each? and now has not science compelled them to believe that it may have been otherwise? And did they not once pretend that every man in the Bible was intended as a pattern of goodness, and now do they not allow that the Bible chronicles men's faults as well as their virtues?"

All these changes of opinion have taken place in the Christian church, but they do not constitute a change of front. Rather, to continue the military simile, they are like the withdrawing of outpost positions which certain over-zealous defenders of Christianity have taken up without orders, and which are now seen to be altogether untenable and dangerous.

To show you that Christianity has not changed front, I need only point to the Apostles' Creed, so named because it embodies the teaching of the very founders of Christianity, and in which no change whatever has been made, in spite of the wonderful advance of science and the persistent opposition of infidelity which has come about in the last few centuries

Let any candid person inquire into the matter, and, if he separate the evil deeds which have been done in the name of Christianity from the actions of those who have really made the Scriptures their guide, he will soon be convinced that Christianity has executed none of those absolute changes of front which have marked the progress of skeptical opinions. But these frequent changes of front of infidelity, though they constitute a strong presumption in favour of Christianity, put Christians at a great disadvantage, from the fact that it takes a considerable time to find out what leader any particular skeptic follows.

We can only compare the whole body of infidels to a Sunday-school treat in which the children are spread out over an immense length of road. The best educated are in front, intent on acquiring information, and anxious to discover truth; in the rear are the rogues, intent upon pranks and mischief. This uneducated

rabble adopt ideas which are about a century old, namely, those of Voltaire and Paine, who alleged that the Bible was such a useless book that it was hardly worth while assigning a date to it. The better educated generally adopt the views of Strauss, who thought that the Gospels must have been written about the third century. These views are now half a century old. The best educated are led by such men as Renan, who believed that the three first Gospels were written soon after the year 70.

Therefore, it is at once apparent over what a wide range infidel ideas extend. This makes it very hard to discover what any particular skeptic believes about the origin of the Bible. Speaking generally, it may be said that the better educated the man the more nearly will he ascribe the Gospels to the date at which Christians believe that they were written.

Christianity, again, always has and always will meet with much opposition from many of those who call themselves philosophers or deep thinkers. Even as early as St. Paul's time they opposed Christianity; and when St. Paul wrote about "opposition of science falsely so-called," there can be little doubt that he meant what we should now call philosophy.

Fortunately a philosopher, Monsieur Bordeau, has betrayed one of the reasons why

those who call themselves deep thinkers are generally hostile to Christianity. He says: "Every positive religion usurps the place which belongs to philosophy. Thus philosophers will always be at enmity with religion."

This lets out the secret. Philosophers say, 'We are wise enough to direct all your actions'; but civilized nations are submitting to be ruled by Christianity, and acknowledging that the rules of life which it inculcates are the best possible. Hence the philosophers wish to destroy Christianity, to get it out of the way, to allow of their rule being introduced.

One question for us is, Are we likely to be happier under such a philosophical *régime*? We may well doubt it.

Another reason why some deep thinkers oppose Christianity is this: Christianity professes to be a revelation from an almighty and omniscient God. Man is neither almighty nor omniscient. Hence, to start with, it seems very unlikely that mortal man should be able to understand the reason for every part of the revelation which the everlasting God has given him. To put it in the words which God spake by Isaiah, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." To speak reverently, this is a perfectly reasonable

statement, at which we have no right to cavil; for we cannot imagine that an almighty God could exist without a deeper understanding than our own. This proposition is also agreed to by thoughtful skeptics, for Laing says: "We are obliged to admit that as the material universe is not, as we once fancied, measured by our standards and regulated at every turn by an intelligence resembling ours; so neither is the moral universe to be explained by simply magnifying our own moral ideas, and explaining everything by the action of a Being who does what we should have done in his place."* Hence, if even skeptics allow the reasonableness of the doctrine, we cannot be surprised if there are some things in God's revelation which we can never expect to fully comprehend.

This one proposition will cover all our difficulties; but sooner than accede to it the modern skeptic will believe a series of infinitely more astonishing statements, which may be summarized in the following creed: He will believe that matter and force have existed from all eternity; that the laws of nature came into operation without a lawgiver; that no mind ever prearranged the process by which this earth was evolved from a mass of gas; that life came down to our earth on a flaming

* "Modern Science and Modern Thought." Page 221.

meteorite, heated to incandescence as it crossed the atmosphere; that the process by which man was evolved from the lowest forms of life was also a chance process; that mind and all mental and spiritual qualities were evolved from reflex muscular action; that the beauty we see in the sunset, and in birds, insects, and flowers, is a product of chance; that the most peculiar nation in the world, the Jews, have not been specially dealt with by God; that the only perfectly good man who ever lived was a deceiver or a fanatic; that all the thousands who subsequently gave their lives for Him did so under a delusion; that all the money and time now given to Christ's cause all over the world is owing to a mistake; and that the greater part of the Gospels, so prized and studied by many of our wisest men, were the invention of tradition—all these difficult things your skeptic will readily believe, and then, forsooth, he will declare that the age of faith is passing away, and that no educated man in the present day can be expected to believe what he cannot understand!

This last is practically the position of many modern philosophers and scientists. It is only plausible on account of the immense recent advances in science. Men feel, "We who know so much must surely be able to under-

stand everything"; consequently they proceed to argue that a revelation must be false if it contains anything which they cannot fully comprehend. Of course these skeptics do not state their position, even to themselves, in all its bare unreasonableness; but practically they are just like the rationalistic chicken in the fable, which, with a piece of eggshell on its back, refused to believe that it had just come out of the shell because it could not understand how it came to be packed away in such a small space. The statement, "What I can't see, I never will believe," is introduced so often at the present day as an argument that we need to be constantly on the watch for it.

But intellectual pride opposes Christianity for another and a far more unworthy reason, and that is this: In no way can a man more cheaply earn a reputation among some for intellectual ability than by professing doubts about the truth of the Bible. For, if he does so, it is almost invariably inferred that his profound scientific knowledge puts him above believing in the simple truths of the Bible; while the natural antipathy among Christians to discuss that which they hold sacred renders him comparatively safe from having his ignorance exposed in awkward discussions. Besides, it is always easier to criticize than to maintain

any system; so that if he *is* involved in a discussion, the knowledge of a few apparent contradictions in the Bible, culled from any infidel book, will probably carry him through with flying colours. This latter fact leads us to another difficulty that Christianity has to meet in its conflict with infidelity. To guard against heresies within, Christianity must take up a definite position and state its belief in certain books and creeds—all these offer definite points of attack. On the other hand, the infidel disputant need pin his faith to the views of no particular writer. If you prove that Voltaire was unreasonable in supposing that the early Christians had any motive for practising deception, he can allow that Voltaire was wrong, and proceed to give Strauss' views; driven from them, he can fall back upon Renan, or change his ground to Huxley's scientific objections. If only infidels would do the fair thing, and, at the beginning of a discussion, state their exact belief and views, the discussions would often have a different termination.

How often we notice, in daily life, that it is easier to criticize than to construct! Why—since we have the power—do we not at each election put the newspaper men into parliament to do the work of those whom they have been so freely criticizing of late? It is because

we know that it is far easier to find fault with definite measures than to propose better ones. The fault-finder generally confines his gaze to one side of a thing—he never takes all the conditions into account. I have very often noticed this in criticisms on military matters, which often appear extremely plausible, but which are really unreasonable, owing to the critic being ignorant of some essential detail. Just so with regard to Christianity and the Bible; if our knowledge were greater we should, in this case, find nothing at all to criticize adversely.

Again, this is an age which loves novelty. Our discoveries and progress have been so remarkable of late that we are accustomed to regard nothing worthy of attention which is not modern. Like the Athenians, we “spend our time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.” Now, the Bible is eighteen centuries old, and therefore there is a natural tendency to regard it as out of date, some boldly contending that it is so. Whether they are right or not, let its mighty influence on millions in Europe and America and Africa decide for us. But, even if we allow the Bible’s power and usefulness, its very age puts it at a disadvantage in an era which despises age. It contains an old story, to which we do not give half enough attention. No exposition of its

plain principles would probably be published in any secular magazine, because such truth may be *old*. Many magazines will, however, admit any views divergent from the plain meaning of Scripture because such are *new*. Consequently many people who are in the habit of gleaning all their views from magazines imagine that all modern thought and originality is being used to attack the Bible, and that there is nothing to be said in its defence. If only the numerous excellent books which have been written in its defence were more read, this mistake would soon be corrected.

At this point it will be well, perhaps, that I should pause for a moment to explain to you exactly what it is that I am trying to demonstrate.

Whenever we hear of clever men being skeptics or becoming skeptics—and we either hear this sad fact or gather it from their writings constantly—every time we come across a fresh case we are liable to think, “if that clever man is an infidel, perhaps there may be some truth in infidelity after all.” Well, there is truth in disbelief, and we may even expect good to come of it *when it confines itself to pointing out the faults of Christians*; and as the church *has* at various times been full of abuses—as in France, before the Revolution—so it is really the case

that disbelief has occasionally been propped up by truth, but it never has been founded upon truth, and it never will be. But, as the doubt is certain to constantly insinuate itself in our minds, it is important that we should know what disbelief is founded upon; that is, what are its real causes, and why it has spread so much of late years.

We have already seen that it may be caused by (1) the desire for power; (2) the dislike to admit that there is anything we cannot understand; (3) the desire to earn a cheap reputation for cleverness; (4) the facility of criticism; (5) the desire for novelty. But the chief difficulty which Christianity has to contend with arises from the rebellion of the human heart against the laws of God. Those laws were all framed for the good of mankind, and even infidels acknowledge that, were they obeyed in the spirit as well as in the letter, most of the social evils which we now deplore would trouble this world no longer. Some infidels try to contend that the seventh commandment is not necessarily for the good of man. This subject we cannot discuss here. Those who have the slightest knowledge of medicine must at once agree that there is no commandment which is so obviously intended for man's good. Our social and family life is

based on this commandment. Therefore, all those who have or are enjoying the inestimable blessing of a peaceful home can judge whether we can dispense with this law. Those who do must dispense with their home happiness along with it. This commandment, together with the one to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," shows us that the God of revelation is the God of nature, because the laws of revelation are so well adapted to meet the natural wants of man. This subject, however, will be more fully discussed in the second address. Suffice it for the present to remind you that any candid person, reading over the ten commandments, must acknowledge that they were framed for the good of man. Why, then, should men desire to disobey them?

In the first place, many people have a natural hatred of any sort of restraint. Any thinking man must acknowledge that if God has given us a revelation, we ought to take it as a guide to our actions. Now, most people long to have their own way. Perhaps Christianity has been misrepresented to them, and they imagine that it is made up of a round of dull observances and irritating restraints, and that, because they see Christians spending their time in work for God, they will necessarily be expected to throw themselves with ardour into

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such employments directly they profess themselves to be Christians. Before they have partaken of any of the blessings which come from a true union with Christ, they naturally feel no zeal for His cause, and look upon such employments as hateful. Christians should, therefore, be very careful to let outsiders understand that, just as wise parents do not expect their children to enter upon their life work directly it would be physically possible for them to do so, so God does not require us to work for Him till we learn to love His service, and to find it so agreeable to our tastes and inclinations as to be perfect freedom. Numbers of men who have resigned their wills to God have found it to be so, and the missionaries of all denominations, at home and abroad, many of whom work for what we may call starvation wages, are proof to us of this fact. Every Christian who allows the world to suppose that he performs good works in spite of his natural inclinations had far better do no good works at all. When we start as Christians, it is only necessary for us to overcome our sins and confess Christ; and when we have learnt to love Him, we shall long to work for Him.

But, to return. Many people become infidels on account of definite sins. First, they forget God and fall into gross sin, which they

know to be displeasing to God. Then, the wish being father to the thought, they say "There is no God." And here we must state that universal experience goes to prove that, though many agnostics live moral lives, the ignorant and scoffing form of *decided* infidelity, and immorality, are generally found together. Offences against a certain commandment, which I have already named, are unfortunately not punishable by the law of the land. Many young men say, "I have a natural longing to break this commandment, and that justifies me in doing so," forgetting that the same reasoning would justify a hungry man for breaking into their houses and eating the meals provided for the household, or the greater part of an army for beating a retreat when exposed to a hot fire to which they cannot reply. If a man glories in being an infidel, my experience is that you may suspect him of being immoral.

Do I, therefore, say that all skeptics lead immoral lives? Not at all. Many, no doubt, are truly moral men—partly to justify their skepticism; partly because they acknowledge the excellence of Christianity; partly on account of what may be called its reflex influence. When an engine-driver shuts off steam, does the train stop at once? No. Why not? Because of the stored-up energy in it. When one

individual disallows Christianity, it would be about as reasonable to expect him to throw off all the good habits he has acquired under it as to expect one among a thousand coupled-up engines, going at a mile a minute, to stop dead when its steam is shut off.

Some skeptical writers have pointed to Renan as an example we all ought to follow; for if he disbelieved Christianity, when apparently every worldly motive should have constrained him to believe, surely, say they, he must have been influenced by overwhelming reasons, on the strength of which we may all follow him.

Let us examine his case. In the first place, he was a Roman Catholic. Now, they do not encourage the study of the Bible at all, far less from the evidential point of view; but they insist that all men must believe on the authority of the church. What, therefore, can poor Renan have known of our reasons for believing Christianity? Absolutely nothing. A beloved sister suggested to him a few plausible reasons for disbelief. Logic, therefore, appeared to him to be all on the skeptical side, and consequently his very honesty forced him into unbelief. (Herein lies the necessity for our study of these matters. The more honest we are, the more likely to become skeptics, if infidel reasoning

finds us quite unprepared.) But, then, it is truly said, Renan became a great scholar, and studied the Bible and all books relating thereto. Why did he not subsequently see reasons for belief if, as Christians allege, these reasons are so convincing? Because he studied with a view to disprove, and was never in a position to see the force of the cumulative evidence for Christianity till he became well known as a skeptic and had published skeptical books.

Once upon a time an Indian doctor was attending upon a very autocratic Rajah, in whom all the power of the state was centred, and who was its only judge or magistrate. This Rajah had made many stringent laws for the good of his subjects, and heavy penalties were to follow disobedience, but he was very seldom seen in public. Now, the doctor became persuaded that the Rajah was smitten with a most rapid incurable disease, and that he was practically a dead man. He made this opinion public. The people said: Such a wise man must necessarily be right. He knows far more about it than we do. We will take his word that the Rajah is practically dead, and live as we please. They did so, and broke practically all the Rajah's laws, thus rendering themselves liable to most heavy punishments. On further studying the case, however, the doctor came to the

conclusion that he had been quite mistaken, and that the Rajah was not sick at all. He was conscious of having acted up to his lights, but he knew the people would hold him responsible for deceiving them and leading them to suppose that they could break their Rajah's laws with impunity. He dared not face the fury of the populace, and therefore fled the country. Though infidelity prevailed in France before Renan's time, who can doubt that he confirmed the French in their opinions? What do you imagine would he then have had to face had he—so to speak—gone back on the French nation? He must have fled the country, besides separating himself from his family of unbelievers.

Now, when we remember that the wish is father to the thought, need we wonder that Renan halted on the threshold of Christianity? How near he was to belief I hope to show you in subsequent addresses. The illustrations I have used, however, will show how hard it is for any person who has once published infidel opinions to acknowledge himself a believer. Nay, seeing that we all acknowledge that every person influences those around him, we see that the same would apply to those who have written and published, or even stated, no infidel views at all, but have merely lived so that their decided skeptical opinions might be inferred.

When we attribute unworthy motives to our opponents we tread upon very dangerous ground, and run a terrible risk of giving unpardonable offence to those who may be sincere in their doubts. We must be most careful to avoid the mistake of putting all infidels and skeptics in one general category, and attributing the base motives we see in some to the whole class. How, then, can we distinguish them? By endeavouring to find out if they are willing to believe, should Christianity be shown to be true. In a word, are they seekers after truth? If so, they deserve our sympathy and prayers, for are we not seekers after truth also?

Now, there are certain classes of skeptics who are evidently *not* seekers after truth. By "truth" I do not mean what we Christians often intend by the term, namely, God's truth as revealed in the Bible; but I mean truth as opposed to falsehood, that which *is* as opposed to that which *is not*. Of course skeptics are not searching after the truths contained in the Bible, in which they do not believe; but the question is, Are they honestly endeavouring to find out whether the book is true or not? If they laugh at it, or wilfully misrepresent it, we may be sure that they wish to prove it false. It was once my duty to read a skeptical book

written under a very taking and apparently edifying title. All through, the author posed as a perfectly impartial seeker after truth. Nowhere did he laugh at Christianity; on the contrary, he professed great respect for it, speaking of Christ as a great teacher whom all should strive to obey. Almost at the end of his book, in referring to David, he said that God not only *condoned* his great sin, but actually *rewarded it* by giving the succession to the throne to the son of his sinful intercourse with Bath-sheba. Now, as you all know, that child died, and its death was only one of the many punishments which followed David's sin. Now, we cannot but conclude that this author either wilfully misrepresented Scripture, or else showed most culpable negligence in not verifying his statements. The whole of a book deserves to be condemned for such grave faults, and we need to be constantly on the watch for them; for, as straws show which way the wind blows, so such statements will enable us to divine if skeptics oppose Christianity because they do not *wish* to believe.

At the conclusion of this lecture, we may briefly recapitulate the disadvantages against which we have seen that Christianity has to contend. First, there is the great multiplicity of the systems at variance with it—which sys-

tems often fraternize with each other while bitterly resisting the advances of Christianity. Then there is the fact that infidels are so continually changing their ground that it is difficult to find out what school of thought any particular opponent belongs to. Again, there is the opposition of philosophy, partly due to the fact that they think Christianity has usurped their power; partly on account of pride of intellect, which shows itself in dislike of acknowledging that God is wiser than man, and in a desire to earn a cheap reputation for being wiser than others. Christianity also is at a disadvantage because it is a definite system, and thus offers many points of attack; because it is ancient, and people nowadays love novelty; and because it is always easier to criticize than to construct. Finally, the Christian system claims the right to control our actions, and mankind hates control, and naturally seeks to justify his rebellion.

Do we therefore apologize for Christianity, arguing that, against such difficulties, it is no wonder that progress should be slow? Not at all. Why should Christians apologize for their glorious and reasonable faith, which is steadily regenerating the world, overcoming and casting out all sorts of sin and evil, penetrating into the most distant and uncivilized quarters

of the globe, and overthrowing systems of religion which have existed for centuries? Has not Christianity stamped out slavery where it has control, and limited it even where it has not control? Has it not placed a check on gambling, as in Louisiana? Did it not reform the barbarous Pacific isles, and so impress the people of Uganda that some of them were willing to die for their faith? Is it not overthrowing the ancient systems of India and Japan, and are not most of the thinking people of civilized countries gladly acknowledging its supremacy?

Why should we apologize for such a faith? We desire to do nothing of the sort. But if we see an electric car run up a steep hill without horses, or a locomotive pull a train up a stiff gradient by no visible power, we confidently argue that some *invisible* power must be doing the work. Just so, since Christianity is making its way against such terrible difficulties,—when we see it, as it were, steadily lifting the weight of the world's sin and evil, we argue that there is a mighty invisible power within it, whence all its outward agencies gain their force. That power is the Holy Spirit of God, which will energize in the church until our Saviour Himself comes again. Our victory is assured. The object of addresses

such as these is not to help bring about that victory, but to lessen our losses in the terrible battle now being waged.

Men! God wants you to help in this battle. You say that there is no room, and that every post of Christian usefulness is occupied? There is no room with the baggage guard—plenty of nominal Christians there; you are not wanted with the reserves—thousands of real Christians are in them. It is in the fighting line you are wanted, and where you will find abundant scope for the exercise of all your powers, especially if you bring forward plenty of ammunition with you. Some one has said, "There is always room at the top." So we say there will always be room in the front, in this great battle against skepticism, sin, and Satan.

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The Credibility of Christianity and the
Difficulties of Disbelief.



ADDRESS NO. II.

The Existence of a Personal God and
the Probability of a Revelation.





THE EXISTENCE OF A PERSONAL GOD AND THE PROBABILITY OF A REVELATION.

OUR subject this afternoon is, "Reasons for Believing in the Existence of a Personal God," and the probability that such a God would give a revelation to make His person and will known to His creatures.

It is a wide and deep subject, about which whole libraries of sound arguments have been written; but it is not necessary that we should devote more than one address to it, because there are not very many persons who deny the existence of such a God.

As you are aware, the only reasonable alternative is to believe that matter and force have existed from all eternity, and that force has so acted on matter, through countless ages, as to produce the marvellous universe which surrounds us. Darwin and Huxley, and other scientific men, have endeavoured to show that, given a few germs which had the power of reproducing their kind with slight variations, these—by what is called natural selection, and other laws—would have progressed through all

the forms of life till finally man stood upon the earth. Many skeptics have seized this idea, and concluded that it does away with any necessity for believing in a wise creator; but they forget that there are many gaps—or, rather, chasms—in their system which still remain unbridged. Each one of these constitutes a “difficulty of disbelief.” A few of them I propose to speak of this afternoon.

In the first place, with reference to the starting assumption of materialists, while it is very difficult to conceive of matter as having existed from all eternity, the present position of our scientific knowledge shows us that *force* cannot have existed from all eternity, because the solar system at least, and probably the universe, is in the condition of a watch running down.

You are all familiar with the old illustration drawn from a watch—how its arrangements reveal not only the hand, but the mind of its maker. It is a totally different argument which I now wish to lay before you.

If I examine this watch and find that, while it is going, there is a continual waste of force or energy by friction at the pivots, I infer that the watch cannot have been going from eternity, because then whatever amount of energy it first started with would long ago have been

used up. And if I further find that the source of its energy, the mainspring, is slowly uncoiling itself, I am confirmed in my conclusion that the watch must have been set going by some one at some definite time. You are aware that the source of all the forces on this earth is the heat of the sun. Horse power, water power, steam power, electric power, can all be traced directly to it. Faraday calculated that the average amount of heat radiated in a day on each acre of ground is equal to that which would be produced by the combustion of sixty sacks of coal.

Now, it appears that this vast quantity of heat is almost all used up on the earth, and so lost to the universe. If it is not lost, where does it go? It might go to make the earth hotter, but scientific men tell us that our planet is cooling. It might be stored up in the form of coal, but we know that our coal supply is rapidly diminishing. It might go to increase the velocity of rotation, but astronomers tell us that the days are getting no shorter. It might be all radiated into space again, but the earth is far more like a heat-trap than a radiating mirror. The clouds act like the roof of a greenhouse and tend to keep the heat in, so that it is only on clear nights that the earth radiates any heat into space, and it certainly does not then

give away as much as it has received on the clear and cloudy days.

Now, we know that the sun consists mainly of the same chemical elements as our earth, and that it obeys some of the same laws; therefore scientific men infer that the general laws of nature are the same for the sun as for the earth. Now, we know of no way in which heat can be created out of nothing, or even multiplied without using up anything, on this earth; hence we conclude that heat cannot be generated out of nothing on the sun or elsewhere in the universe. Therefore all heat used up on the earth is energy lost to the universe, as the heat generated by friction is a measure of the energy lost to the watch.

Now, let us talk of the mainspring—the sun. It is continually radiating out heat waves in (as Ganot tells us) all directions. Those which fail to strike on any heavenly body must be wasted, unless we imagine a mirror all round the universe to send them back again. When we remember that all but the nearest stars are to us merely mathematical points, having no magnitude in the most powerful telescopes, we see what an enormous proportion of the sun's heat must be wasted. Some have supposed its heat to be maintained by the impact of meteorites on its surface, but Ganot

says: "Although some of the sun's heat may be restored by the impact of such bodies against the sun, the amount must be very small." A proof by Sir W. Thompson (now Lord Kelvin) follows, and then a theory that the sun's heat appears to be due to its slow contraction, which of course must have a limit, so that scientific men are no doubt right in their present belief that the universe will ultimately become a uniformly warm mass. Hence we logically infer that the force or energy it now displays cannot have existed from all eternity.

"Oh, but," you say, "all this is taking no account of the doctrine of the conservation of energy." I am aware of that theory, believe in it, and take it to mean that the Almighty has so arranged this earth that it shall be very economical of its heat, which passes through numbers of different forms before it is finally dissipated and lost. Clerk Maxwell and others stated, some years ago, that energy could not be dissipated, and you will find the theory so put in many scientific books of twelve or fifteen years ago. Now, scientific men are abandoning this theory. Those who wish to prove it—*i.e.*, "the indestructibility and possible eternity of energy"—are stating their view with less confidence. Witness the articles on "Recent Science" in the *Nineteenth Century*, which

allowed that the theory was still unproved; while, on the other hand, scientific men are boldly declaring it unprovable, for Langley, in the *Century Magazine* for February, 1887, says: "Every process which we know tends to the dissipation or rather degradation of heat, and seems to point, in our present knowledge, to the final decay and extinction of the light of the world." Balfour Stewart, F.R.S., in his work on "The Conservation of Energy" writes: "Although, therefore, in a strictly mechanical sense, there is a conservation of energy, yet, as regards usefulness or fitness for living beings, the energy of the universe is in process of deterioration." Sir W. Thompson, the greatest scientific authority in this line, wrote an article in the *Fortnightly* for May, 1892, on "The Dissipation of Energy," proving, by a totally different line of argument than I have used, that energy is wasted.

If the theory of the indestructibility and eternity of energy be abandoned, it will only be the last with which skeptics have propped up their system, and which they have had to discard. What has become of Bathybius, from which Huxley had supposed all life had sprung, and on which Strauss rested the central arch of his argument against the supernatural? The "Challenger's" voyage proved it to be sulphate of lime.

To return; when the Yankee, standing by Niagara, remarked, "What a waste of mill power there is here!" he was stating a greater truth than he thought. The universe *is* wasting its force, which has *not* existed from all eternity. Whose mighty power, then, first gave rotation to the mass of nebulous matter out of which some maintain that the solar system—and possibly the universe itself—has grown? Though this be its origin, we are still constrained to believe in a God who gave it motion.

It would thus appear that those who wish to eliminate God from the universe have a very uncertain starting-ground, but there are many other missing links in their chain besides that which is supposed to come between monkey and man.

The principal of these is the origin of life. For a time it was supposed that life might spring from mere dead matter. Scientific men were never very sure of this, and the Encyclopædia of 1875 says: "The properties of living matter distinguish it absolutely from all other kinds of things." And again: "The present state of our knowledge furnishes us with no link between the living and the not living," and speaks of "the so-called protein which has never yet been obtained except as a product of living bodies."

Cook, in his book on biology, states that it is conceded by evolutionists "that spontaneous generation has never been known to occur*; that it is against all the ascertained analogy of nature to suppose that it ever has occurred; that if spontaneous generation has not occurred, it must be admitted that a supernatural act originated life in the primordial cell or cells; that the doctrine of evolution, as held by Huxley, cannot be true, unless some bridge can be found to span the chasm between the living and the not living; that the present state of our knowledge furnishes us with no such bridge."

Who makes all these far-reaching concessions? Professor Huxley. Where? In a most suggestive article on "Biology," published in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

The agnostic Laing says: "Science can give us no account of how these germs and nucleated cells, endowed with these marvellous capacities for evolution, came into existence, or got their intrinsic powers."†

Lord Kelvin says: "About twenty-five years ago I asked Leibig (the great chemist) if he believed that a leaf or a flower could be formed or could grow by chemical forces. He answered: 'I could more readily believe that a book on

*Biology. J. Cook. P. 32.

† Modern Science and Modern Thought. J. Laing.

chemistry or botany could grow out of dead matter by chemical process.'''*

Thus we see that scientific men unite in affirming that the origin of the primal germs of life is enshrouded in complete mystery.

Finally, Professor Drummond, in his "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," stated that the theory of spontaneous generation has been entirely given up; that further experiments have shown that there can be no life without pre-existent life, and that this theory is victorious "all along the line."

If, then, man has been evolved from a primal germ, who gave life to that primal germ? Christians reply, "God, the author and giver of life." And here we should remark that many Christians now admit that God *may* have brought living creatures into existence by evolving higher types out of lower. And, indeed, we have positive evidence of the interference of an outside power in the process of evolution; for Sir William Dawson, the author of "Acadian Geology," says that the present evidences "throw us back on a doctrine of a sudden appearance of new forms, occurring at certain portions of geological time, rather than at others"; and, after some further geological arguments, he says: "It would seem, then, that

*Fortnightly Review, May, 1892.

man must have been introduced, not by a process of gradual development, but in some abrupt and sudden way."

The idea of God working by and superintending evolution is held by an increasing number of scientific men, both biologists and geologists, and is a perfectly reasonable belief; but to imagine that all the many forms of beautiful life have been evolved by the operation of blind laws, acting without control or guidance, is most unreasonable, and to most persons utterly incomprehensible. The trouble is that skeptics have involved this part of the argument in a great deal of obscurity by using long high-sounding words, forgetting that truth can always afford to be plain and simple. Germans say, "The clear is always the truth." Herbert Spencer, the apostle of agnosticism, says: "Evolution is a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity," by an infinite series of differentiations and integrations," which has been very accurately translated into plain English thus: "Evolution is a change from a no-how-ish, un-talk-about-able all-alike-ness to a somehow-ish, in-general-talk-about-able, not-all-alike-ness, by an infinite series of something-elsifications and stick-together-ations."

When we read the sentence clothed in its

long words, we are inclined to rather acknowledge that the author must be right than take the trouble to decipher his meaning. Thus, some men become skeptics more because they cannot understand skeptical books than because they have really imbibed their teaching ; but when we translate it into plain English, we see that evolution by no means, even by Spencer's definition, does away with the necessity for believing in a God. For, otherwise, who first formed the new organs, before their use allowed of their development? and who combined the factors of evolution, so as to cause development? Remember that it is a contradiction in words to talk of evolving out of a thing that which was never in it.

You will have noticed by the above arguments that, at present, the highest science goes to prove that there is a God. There are many other reasons for believing in the existence of a great First Cause, but we will not linger among them, but proceed at once to state our reasons for believing that this great First Cause possesses intelligence, volition, free agency, love of order, a moral nature—in fact, is a person with a mighty mind, and has carefully arranged this world for our habitation.

That the first cause possesses intelligence is proved to us by the numerous arrangements

and adaptations of the universe, which, as Dr. Row says, exist in numbers past all human comprehension. In one or two of his books he enlarges on the wonderful adaptation of the throat to produce sounds, the air to convey them, and the ear to receive them, arguing that such marvellous arrangements and designs must have proceeded from the mind of God. The argument is very strong, and is only partially broken by the atheistical evolutionist contention, or rather assumption, that their primal germs had the power of altering themselves so as to take advantage of whatever they found upon the earth.

Let us, therefore, take the case of a thing without life, which nobody believes has ever altered its nature. Take water; I propose to show you how obviously all the laws relating to it, and all its history from the time when it falls as rain to the time when, having passed into clouds, it returns as rain again—how all this is evidently designed for the good of any sort of living beings which the mind can imagine, but particularly for the good of man as he now stands upon the earth.

Water first comes to us as rain or snow, and is so distributed over the face of almost the whole globe, sufficient desert being left to show us how much we ought to value the rain.

(And no one who has not been in the desert, as I have, can imagine what it is to be without water, or the peculiar force of the numerous passages of Scripture which refer to it.) Fortunately, the rain does not fall by bucketfuls, but by drops, which break nothing. Being distributed, it can easily be obtained by almost every one ; being fluid, and obeying the law of gravity, it is very easily conveyed from place to place. Man uses it for drinking, cooking, washing, and countless other purposes, for all of which it is most perfectly fitted. It is absolutely necessary for the life of plants and animals. What is not used either by animals or plants runs away in streams, which slowly wear valleys in the hills, and greatly add to the beauty and variety of our landscapes. These streams turn many of our mills, and convey produce down to the larger rivers, which we find so useful for purposes of inland communication. At their mouths these rivers generally form harbours, invaluable to shipping, and so run into the sea, which is not only the great purifier of the globe, but also its great highway ; without which, especially prior to the introduction of railways, the spread of civilization would have been immeasurably retarded. The heat of the sun, acting by complicated laws, draws the water up from the sea to form clouds ;

winds are provided to carry these over the earth, where they not only afford us a screen from what would otherwise be a monotonous glare, but also, when lit up at sunrise and sunset by reflected light, these clouds produce some of the most marvellous scenes which man ever witnesses, and which alone have convinced many persons that "the heavens are the Lord's." Acted on by other complicated laws, the clouds condense and again return in the form of rain, thus completing a cycle, every step of which is evidently thoughtfully arranged for our benefit by a personal, loving God. To say that man has been evolved so as to take advantage of these wonders in no way accounts for their existence, which is evidently altogether independent of every living thing. Thus you see that this argument is altogether independent of any theory of evolution, true or false.

Much might be said about the other forms which water takes—how the snow, with its marvellously varied hexagonal crystals, tends to keep the ground warm, while its occasional absence allows of the frost getting down sufficiently far to break up the surface and render it more fertile. But there is only one other fact which I should like to draw your attention to, by an extract from Roscoe's chemistry,

which I have only altered by turning degrees centigrade into degrees Fahrenheit. "When water is heated from 32° to 40° it contracts, thus forming a striking exception to the general law that bodies expand when heated and contract when cooling. On cooling from 40° to 32° it expands again; above 40° , however, it follows this ordinary law, expanding when heated, and contracting when cooled. Hence we conclude that water above or below 40° is lighter than water at 40° . This cooling goes on till the temperature of the top layer of water sinks to 32° , after which a crust of ice is formed; but if the mass of the water is sufficiently large, the temperature of the water at the bottom is never reduced below 40° . Had water become heavier as it cooled down to the freezing point, a continual circulation would be kept up until the mass was cooled to 32° , when solidification of the whole would ensue. Thus our lakes and rivers would be converted into solid masses of ice, which the summer's warmth would be quite insufficient thoroughly to melt, so that many of our temperate regions would have had to endure a climate of arctic severity."

This extract from Roscoe should be of peculiar interest to fishermen; as, if it were not for this exception to general law, all the

fish in our rivers would of course be killed every winter.

Now, even if it be possible to believe that the general law about cooling bodies contracting came into existence by blind chance, who can believe that this marvellous variation of the law with reference to water cooled below 40° was not arranged by a lawgiver who saw that an exception was here necessary? We shall have occasion to refer to this again, when speaking about miracles. But we have only been speaking of the uses of one of the countless chemical combinations which exist on this earth. Who, then, shall estimate the millions of adaptations which exist in the universe? Are we to believe that no superintending mind has arranged all these things, but that they have come about by blind chance? No. We reject the idea with scorn, and firmly believe in a God, the perfection of whose mighty mind is established by the universe He has arranged.

The skeptic endeavours to break the force of this line of reasoning by denying the existence of mind apart from matter. He argues: "*I know of no case in which mind exists without matter. I find that the intelligence of every animal is proportioned to the size of its brain. No phosphorus—no thought. If there be no matter, there can be no mind; therefore*

the mind of God (if there be a God) must exist in a material habitation. Hence either humanity, nature, or the universe is God, or there is no God at all." The fallacy of all this lies in its being an argument which is based on ignorance.

Suppose a lawyer defending a man in a murder trial, and a witness is called who professes total ignorance of the occurrence; his evidence is, of course, valueless. "Oh, but," you say, "even if he knows nothing of the murder, he can still be used to prove an *alibi*; that is, that the accused person was far away when the murder was committed." Yes, but then his evidence is no longer based on ignorance, but on knowledge. Unless he practically says, "I *know* that the accused was somewhere else at the time," his evidence is valueless. Thus we see that it is useless to argue from ignorance. But is not the materialist arguing from ignorance when he says, "I do not know how mind can exist apart from matter; therefore it does not"? Another form of this argument from ignorance is: "I do not know how personality can exist without limitation; therefore, if God be a person, He cannot be almighty." A question thirty centuries old has not yet been answered by the atheists. It is: "Who hath put wisdom into the inward

parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?" Job xxxviii. 36.

Ex nihilo nihil fit—out of nothing, nothing comes. What attributes we possess must have been implanted in us by a Being who Himself possesses those attributes in greater perfection. If we have volition, God has it too. If we are free agents, so is He. This matter of the free agency of man is an intensely difficult subject, and is bitterly controverted by skeptics, though it is one of our primary intuitions. We cannot, for want of time, go into the subject. Suffice it to point out that, if there be no God, then man is not a free agent, and hence we have no right to punish anybody for evil deeds which an irresistible necessity compels them to commit. Whether a system can be right whose logical effect would be to limit us to restraining evil-doers, instead of punishing them, I leave you to determine. How are we to always prevent men from stealing unless we handcuff everybody? Remember how murders increase when murderers are merely imprisoned for life instead of being executed. Nature punishes severely; so may we; so will God.

That God possesses love of order is, I think, manifest from what we have already seen of the uniformity of law throughout the universe. This love of order extends into wonderful

analogies between the natural and spiritual universe, as Butler and Drummond have so well shown. Remember, however, that God's love of order is not such as to prevent His making an exception to law; for we saw He has done so in the case of water expanding as it cools at certain temperatures. That there is a God above us possessing love of order is further proved to us by our conscience. Man's conscience is different from a dog's in that, while a dog never appears to feel remorse apart from fear of punishment, man often feels remorse when no evil consequences seem likely to come upon him for his actions—as Scott said, in “Marmion”:

“Tis minds of native pride and force
That mainly feel thy pangs—remorse.
Fear for their scourge base cowards have;
Thou art the torturer of the brave.”

Thus we see that remorse is not to be accounted for by fear of punishment. Whence is it, then? Is it not because we know that we *ought*—that is, “owed it”—to do differently? Owed it to whom? To the Being who implanted conscience within us—that is, God.

But there is a stronger argument than any of the above to show that the universe is governed by God, and cannot have been produced

by the action of blind force upon matter. This argument is drawn from the existence of our mental and moral attributes. Whence come all these things—reason, memory, love, hope, faith, trust, joy, sorrow? Are we going to believe that a mother's love is only a peculiar combination of force acting upon matter? Whence comes our moral sense, which tells us what is right and what is wrong? How do we know that we ought to do to others as we would they should do to us? To say that it is because Jesus of Nazareth told us so is not a sufficient explanation for the materialist to offer; because, if his theories are right, then Jesus of Nazareth was a mere man, and it is absurd to believe that the dreams of a Galilæan carpenter have given moral ideas to the civilized world. Besides, as our skeptical friends so often insist, there is some evidence to show that these ideas existed in India and elsewhere before Jesus Christ was born. What do the other side say? They follow their usual plan. When a big difficulty to their system presents itself, they jump over it with a big statement, such as: "Nothing can be more certain than that moral ideas have been evolved by a process similar to that which produced the higher forms of life." Even granting their statement, they still have to account for the origin of

moral ideas, just as physical evolutionists have to account for the origin of life. Tyndall, the only one who, I believe, has dared to formulate their creed in this matter, says: "Emotion, intellect, will, and all their phenomena, were once latent in a fiery cloud." That is to say, he believes man's moral attributes existed in matter, whose atoms he describes as so small, so strong, so wise.

Now, you cannot apply any of the adjectives by which we describe matter to any moral attributes. Cook derisively asks: "What is the shape of love? How many inches long is fear? What is the colour of memory?" By these absurd questions you see that matter and mind have wholly different, irreconcilable properties; and how can wholly different, irreconcilable properties co-exist in the same atom?

In Germany, I hear, they consider that if a man is a materialist there must have been something radically wrong in his education. The Germans are a people of very good, sound sense.

I hope that all the above lines of reasoning will be clinched to your minds by the following argument—that moral ideas cannot have been the product of evolution. To this I invite your close attention. We have all heard about the law of the survival of the fittest. Darwin

closes the sixth edition of his work on "The Origin of Species" with the words, "Let the strongest live, and the weakest die." The evolutionist claims that it is the operation of this law which has caused the race to progress, by killing off the weak and sickly, and all those who have any physical defect. Now, our moral sense of right and wrong has taught us to care for the weak and sickly; for instance, to build hospitals, infirmaries, asylums, dispensaries, and to assist those upon whom the struggle for life presses too hardly. By so doing we break and strive to nullify the law that the fittest only should be allowed to survive, and all those with any defect be left to perish. If, then, our moral sense of right and wrong be, as the atheist says, a product of evolution, then I say that evolution has produced a force which is directed against its own laws. It is a case of Satan casting out Satan—a house divided against itself. Where, in nature, can we point to another law which is stopping itself and hindering its own operations? Science cries out against such an idea. No; evolution has not produced our moral sense of right and wrong. That, at least, has been implanted within us by a Being who Himself possesses these moral attributes, of which ours are only a feeble copy, barely sufficient to en-

able us to grasp a slight perception of His moral nature, and His wisdom, goodness, and love.

A darker side to this matter is now looming up before us. A few atheistical evolutionists are beginning to see that, to be logical, they must deny that man is right to assist his fellow-creatures; for this assistance can only be given by some self-sacrifice, and—as a writer in a widely-circulated magazine recently said—self-sacrifice will soon be looked upon as just as foolish as self-mutilation. God help us if this idea should gain ground! Who would attempt to lead a company into action if it were composed of men holding this notion? Nay, who would even dare to travel by railway or steamer?—for is not the safety of travelling dependent upon men sacrificing their comfort, labour, and even life, to a sense of duty? Good-bye to our home happiness; good-bye to our loftiest ideals. Shall we relapse into savage barbarism? Nay; from this ghastly fate, truth, and the assurance of God's existence, shall complete our deliverance.

In summing up these arguments, to what shall we compare the whole atheistical system? It is like a building so designed that it can only rest upon four pillars, each of which is absolutely necessary to its stability. The first

pillar is the eternity of matter and force, and is to be founded upon a first cause other than God. One stone only for this pillar has been cut out. The second pillar is "spontaneous generation." The atheists erected this with great rejoicings some years ago, but it tumbled down, and nobody knows how to set it up again. The third pillar is atheistic evolution, and is to be founded on the assumption that the germ produced by spontaneous generation had the power of reproducing its kind with slight variations—sufficient instinct for sexual selection, etc. The atheists are now dancing round this unfinished but already set-up pillar in great glee; but the pillar shows signs of taking such a shape as to make it unfit for the atheistical structure, and more suited for another temple, that of Christian evidences, about which we will speak later on. The fourth pillar is the development of man's moral nature, and is to be founded, so some say, on reflex muscular action, or the latent wonders of a fiery cloud; but the atheists are fighting shy of attempting to cut stones for this pillar.

At best, the state of things is: One pillar up, one half up, one tumbled down and smashed, and one practically not begun; and yet the atheists are demanding that we should leave our well-founded structure to take shelter under their ruin. No, thank you!

So far, and as to the existence of a creator, most men are agreed; but many refuse to acknowledge the force of the next argument, which is this: If there be a personal God, who has carefully arranged this world for our habitation, is it not extremely probable that He would make Himself and His will known to His creatures? In other words, that He would make some revelation of Himself to man?

Now, many unbelievers argue that what they call natural religion is quite sufficient for man; in other words, that man can himself discover all that it is necessary that he should know about God, himself, and his duty, and can also find, or else impose upon himself, sufficient motives for doing his duty.

But we can only guess how much man would have found out about all of these things, because Christianity and the Bible have so permeated modern thought that we can never be sure whether certain ideas and motives spring from them or from the mind of man unless we refer to history. Let us, then, appeal this matter to the ordinary records of the Greeks and Romans, and see, not only what were their ideas of social duties, but how they actually lived; for this last is the true test, seeing that a system is useless if it only teaches man what is right, but does not supply sufficient

motive for him to *do* right. And as I show you the utter selfishness and misery which underlaid the splendid civilizations of these refined and intellectual people, I hope you will contrast their wretched state, not only with the way we live now, but with the state to which the world would attain if Christ's laws were obeyed in the spirit; and I think you will see that we may draw from their moral debasement a double argument. First, that the state of the world before Christ came was such as to make a great revelation highly necessary, and therefore—if our former considerations have convinced us that there is a God—extremely probable; and, secondly (whether we believe that there is such a God or not), that Christianity *is* so reforming the world, and is so much better adapted to the needs and nature of man than any of the systems which man could or did discover by himself, that we start our course of Christian evidences with a strong presumption that Christianity was not invented by man, but was revealed from above.

And here let me beg you to notice that I entirely discard an argument which has been so often advanced by well-meaning Christians; thus: "We need Christianity, therefore let us believe in it." Although it would appear that man can believe in Christianity directly he

acknowledges the possibility that it may be true, just as a man can trust his life to a rope if he sees the slightest reason to hope that it may bear the strain, yet no honest man can believe in a thing merely because he wishes to do so. Skeptics say that we are continually crying out, "Oh, the pity of giving up Christianity!" We need to show them that we believe in Christianity, not because we merely wish to, but because we are really convinced that it has been given us by divine revelation; and, remember, the emotions of our hearts have nearly as much right to influence our convictions as the logic of our minds.

Let us, then, put this particular part of the matter thus: We believe in Christianity, because experience has shown that it is far better adapted to the needs of man's body and heart than any system which the mind of man has ever conceived, and we conclude that such a system was not invented by man, but was revealed by his Maker. Suppose, at the World's Fair at Chicago, the machinery section is found to contain an engine of novel construction, which no one can work properly; and suppose a man comes along and says, "I can make that engine work," and they reply, "Why, lots of men have tried, and no one can make the thing run, and no one has ever seen the likes of it

before," and the man again says: "I can make that engine work," and proceeds to do so—would not the bystanders feel certain that he was either the maker or his assistant? It is for a similar reason that we Christians, as we contemplate the success of Christianity, believe that it was by Christ that God "made the worlds."

Let us, then, glance briefly, first at the state of the bulk of the people under ancient civilizations; and then at the systems of ethics and philosophy which they composed. Have you ever heard of there having been any hospitals, infirmaries, asylums, dispensaries, orphan homes, or even poor-houses, in any of the grand cities of ancient Greece or Rome? Look at Gell and Gandy's *Pompeiana*, with an indexed plan of the so long buried city, and with descriptions of tombs, fountains, towers, ramparts, amphitheatre, barracks, reservoirs, schools, temples, etc., is there a single building that appears to have been put to any charitable purpose? Not one. Do we read of such in ancient history? Nowhere. Had they no sick, injured, lame, blind, orphans, or paupers in those days? Why, certainly they had. What did they do with them? Simply nothing; just left them to beg or die. This was the wretched state of all those who suffered

from any defect or ailment, and even the rich lived under the most uncomfortable assurance that, should misfortune come upon them, they would obtain no mercy from their fellow-creatures, even as they had shown no mercy.

But, leaving the sick, let us take the case of the whole. Have you read "Ben-Hûr"—that most interesting sketch-story of the state of the world when Christ came? Do you recollect the great sea-fight? Were you not struck by the misery of the wretched galley-slaves, who rowed chained to the benches, though it entailed their being burnt alive if the enemy succeeded in setting the trireme afire? That was a true picture of the misery of slavery under ancient Rome, both for sailors and landsmen. You have read "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which gives another picture of slavery—and a slavery, mind you, based on the old Roman servile law, not on Hebrew slavery, which was quite a different thing, and never allowed the bond-servant to be looked upon as a chattel. These books show you the wretched condition of the slaves—a large proportion of the population in the days of Greece and Rome. If a Roman slave-owner was murdered, and his assassin could not be discovered, all his slaves had to be executed.

Now, what was the state of the freemen in

Rome—first, of the lower classes? We are by no means always just now in our treatment of the poor, but surely this was worse. In Macaulay's "Virginia" are the following lines:

"Exult, ye proud patricians, the hard-fought fight is o'er,
We strove for honours, 'twas in vain ; for freedom, 'tis
no more.

No crier to the polling summons the eager throng,
No tribune breathes the word of might that shields the
weak from wrong.

Our very hearts, that were so high, sink down beneath
your will,

Riches, and lands, and power, and state ; ye have
them, keep them still.

Still press us for your cohorts, and, when the fight is
done,

Still fill your garners with the spoil which our good
swords have won ;

Still, like a spreading ulcer which leech-craft cannot
cure,

Let your foul user eat away the substance of the poor ;
Still let your haggard debtors bear all their fathers
bore ;

Still let your dens of torment be noisome as of yore.

No fire when Tiber freezes, no air in dog-star heat,
But store of rods for freeborn backs, and holes for free-
born feet.

Heap heavier still the fetters, bar closer still the gate ;
Patient as sheep, we yield us up unto your cruel hate."

This hate was the dominant passion of Rome. All the different classes hated each other. Hate seems to have generally pre-

veiled, even in the families and social bodies, so much so that it afterwards became a marvel—"See how these Christians *love* one another!"

And how about the patricians? Were they happy? Before the senate of Rome the censor Metellus had declared, without one dissentient murmur, that marriage could only be regarded as an intolerable necessity. Before that same senate a leading consular had not scrupled to assert that there was scarcely one among them all who had not ordered one or more of his own infant children to be exposed to death. Remember their cruel sports—the picture of the ladies seated round the arena, with their thumbs turned down to signify that the vanquished gladiator should be slain; the tortures to which they put animals in their public shows, and even men and women also. In the play called "Laureolus," an actor must really be crucified and mangled by a bear, and really fling himself down and deluge the stage with blood. When the heroism of Mucius Scaevola was represented, a real criminal must thrust his hand without a groan into the flame, and stand motionless while it is being burnt. Other things were acted on the public stage, so shameful that they cannot be mentioned. Well might Seneca say, in the time of St.

Paul: "Wickedness is no longer secret; it is before our eyes. It has become so public, and holds such power, that innocence is not merely rare; it exists no more." Augustus sacrificed three hundred men at one time on Cæsar's altar. Sextus Pompeius also devoted human sacrifices to Neptune.

Farrar truly says: "The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity was an epoch of which the horror and the degradation have rarely been equalled, and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind. Proofs of its abnormal wickedness are stamped upon its coinage, cut on its gems, painted on its chamber walls, sown broadcast over the pages of its poets, satirists, and historians." And yet this was an epoch of civilization, of learning and refinement. Are we, with these facts before us, going to believe that man can discover or impose upon himself rules of life or motives sufficient to make him do rightly, and that the revelation of God's will as to how he should live is altogether unnecessary?

But some say that the ancient heathen philosophers reproved these vices, and set many excellent moral precepts before the people. But we must remember that "these fine utterances of moral truth did not stand alone, being spoiled and dishonoured by other

opinions of the same writers which fell far below the true standard of morality." Did not Seneca glorify the act of suicide as among the heroic virtues? Did not Plato praise the Athenians for cultivating a hatred of forgiveness? Again, in his ideal republic, did he not obliterate the sanctity of family life by degrading wedlock, and proposing a community of women? Did not even Socrates wink at vice? For these great philosophers saw that they could offer to man no sufficient inducement to act unselfishly and do rightly, and they openly avowed their incompetence to settle the great problems of human thought without some other teacher superior to themselves. And what were their systems of philosophy? No doubt Paul was quoting a proverb of the Epicureans when he wrote: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." "Be not deceived," he adds, to show that he did not endorse the pure selfishness of this proverb. What would be the limit to human misery if every man considered that his only end in life was to gratify his own appetites and passions?

But the Stoics—surely they knew better? Yes; a little. Farrar says: "Stoicism aimed at cherishing an insensibility which gave no real comfort, and for which it offered no adequate motive. It aimed at repressing the

passions by a violence so unnatural that with them it also crushed some of the gentlest and most elevating emotions. Its self-satisfaction and exclusiveness repelled the gentlest and sweetest natures from its communion. It made a vice of compassion, which Christianity inculcated as a virtue; it cherished a haughtiness which Christianity discouraged as a sin. It was unfit for the task of ameliorating mankind, because it looked on human nature in its normal aspects with contemptuous disgust. Its marked characteristic was a despairing sadness, which became specially prominent in its most sincere adherents. Its favourite theme was the glorification of suicide, which wise moralists had severely reprobated, but which many Stoics belauded as the one sure refuge against oppression and outrage. It was a philosophy which was indeed able to lacerate the heart with a righteous indignation against the crimes and follies of mankind, but which vainly strove to resist, and which scarcely even hoped to stem, the ever-swelling tide of vice and misery. For wretchedness it had no pity; on vice it looked with impotent disdain."

But, if their philosophies were helpless, perhaps their religious systems taught them better. The following extracts are from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*;

"There is not a single one of the ancient religions which has not consecrated by some ceremonial right even the grossest forms of sensual indulgence, while many of them actually elevated prostitution into a solemn service of religion."

"The corrupting influence of Paganism entered into the very essence of the social life of the Roman at the time when Christianity began its career. The thoughtful reader of contemporary literature cannot fail to observe how, day by day, the poison instilled itself into every nook and cranny of the social life of the people."

"There is no contrast more wonderful than that which may be drawn between Roman law and the debasement of the ordinary life of the Roman people."

Now mark! These great Romans, from whom civilized nations still copy their laws, endeavoured to stamp out Christianity because they were *afraid it would overthrow popular religion* (witness the well-known correspondence between Trajan and Pliny), and they were convinced that the state could not live unless the people had some religion. If, then, these wise statesmen valued their vile systems, how should we regard Christianity! and how should we hesitate before giving it up!

But this is by the way. We may now well

summarize the results of our historical inquiry in the lines of the poet, Arnold :

“ On that hard pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell.
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell ! ”

Are we going to believe that a personal God first arranged this world with infinite care for our habitation, and then left it to welter in such a sea of misery ? No ; we feel convinced that such a God would grant a revelation, and that it remains for us to seek it among the religions of the world.

Shall we choose the second oldest, Hinduism, where—according to Macaulay—“ all is hideous and grotesque and ignoble,” and which another writer says “ is worse than having no religion at all ” ? Or shall we, with the Buddhists, live in hopes of being absorbed into Nirvana—which can only be defined as nothingness ? Or shall we strive to be initiated into the mysteries of Theosophy, and run the risk of proving them akin to some which Hippolytus described as “ the consummation of wickedness ” ? Or shall we join the Spiritualists, and deserve the fate of those deserters who are ignobly shot for endeavouring to enter into communication with the enemy ? Or shall we look forward to the Mahometan’s

sensuous paradise, and join the religion of those who have so long carried on the terrible slave trade in the heart of Africa ?

What is the state of things in India, where these systems hold sway ? M. Mitchell writes : "The burning of widows has been prohibited by enactment, but the awful rite would in many places be restored were it not for the strong hand of the British Government. Widows are subjected to treatment which they deem worse than death." To a European, who does not see much of the inner life of the people, their condition may seem tolerable ; but a lady who has been in their Zenanas recently stated in Halifax that the native men never speak to their little girls, who are so settled in sadness that they cannot even be made to laugh ; that thousands of Hindu girl babies are exposed in the jungle every year, and she had herself seen two which had been mangled by wild beasts, which never happens to boy babies. The Mahometans leave many of their girl babies to starve." (The Chinese drown them.) "All widows have to fast and abstain from water all day, once every month."

Well, if such wicked things are done under these systems, shall we just pick out the best teachings from all religions, and be guided by them ? Beware of such religious eclecti-

cism; for if there be a personal, loving God, who has given a revelation to man, He would surely have known that the bulk of mankind have not the time or the chance of examining all religious systems in order to choose out the best teachings from each. In fact, once we believe in a personal and loving God, we cannot help feeling certain that Christianity is His revelation to man, for it is vastly superior to all other systems in four main points:

First, it is the only system of religion which has given a perfect law to man, stigmatizing as sin all which is hurtful to him in all his relations and circumstances of life; and has also given man a perfect example of a faultless life.

Secondly, it is the only system which has adequately shown man the awful nature of sin, by its doctrine that the Son of God must needs come down to earth to die for sinners.

The magnitude of the price paid for man's redemption has enabled him to feel the peace of a conscience reconciled to God. This is the third point in which the Christian religion is immeasurably superior to all other systems, whose great want is a propitiation of value sufficient to atone for sin. "When once the Gospel is received by a Hindu, no question remains as to whether a pilgrimage to Delhi, or

an act of penance before the car of Juggernaut, would not be more efficacious than faith in Christ."

The fourth point in which Christianity vastly surpasses all other systems is that it is the only religion which is founded upon and permeated by love. How often we Christians fail to show that love which our system of religion teaches—especially, perhaps, to outsiders! The fault is ours; it does not lie in Christianity; for, first, we believe that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; then that the love of Christ should constrain us to love others, conquer our sins, and give up our lives to His service, for "this is love, that we walk after his commandments." How inseparably happiness and love are associated together! Why is a true home always a happy place? Is it not because of the atmosphere of love which reigns there? It is this thought which makes us certain that heaven will be an abode of supreme happiness—for there love will be perfected.





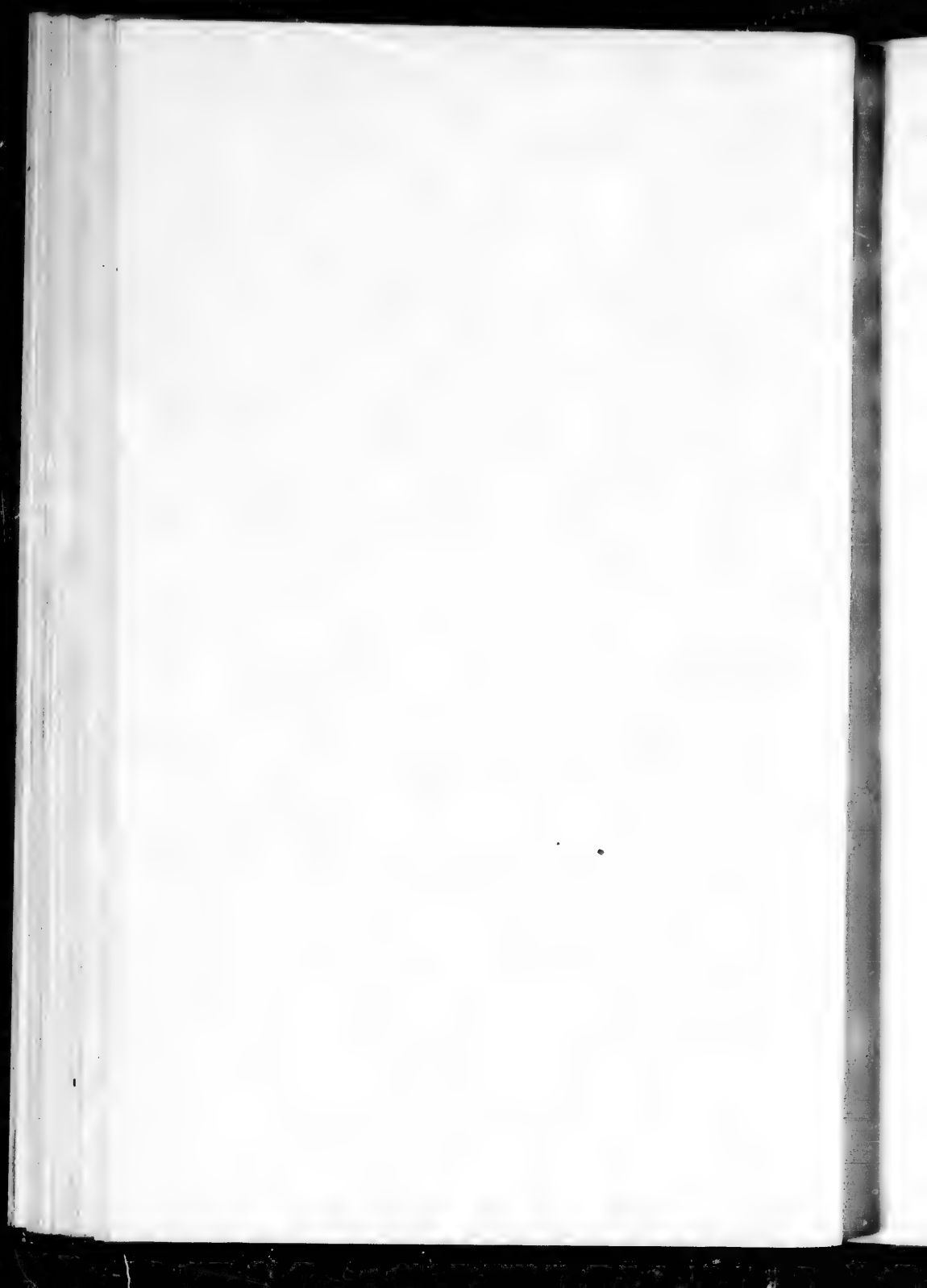
The Credibility of Christianity and the
Difficulties of Disbelief.

ADDRESS NO. III.

The Witness of Prophecy.

N.B.—The extracts from Scripture are from the Revised
Version. The extracts from Renan are taken from Wil-
bour's translation of the "Vie de Jésus."





THE WITNESS OF PROPHECY.

THE title for this address was suggested to me by the Rev. Dyson Hague, and is a singularly appropriate one, because many of the prophecies to which I shall refer are a present witness to us of the truth of Scripture.

In speaking of the "Evidences of Christianity," we have to take some facts on the testimony or witness of others, but the supernatural character of prophecy we can test for ourselves. If we only know what things the Bible does foretell, our own eyes and the daily papers become evidences to us of its truth. "The greatest of the proofs of Jesus Christ are the prophecies." So wrote Blaise Pascal, the scientist, of whom an Englishman wrote: "We regard Pascal not only as the greatest genius, but as the holiest man that France ever produced."

So much for the importance of the subject. It is the first pillar in the temple of Christian evidences which we hope to build up in these addresses; and, let me remark, it is a pillar which skeptics are very chary of attempting to overthrow. Laing, who professes to take a



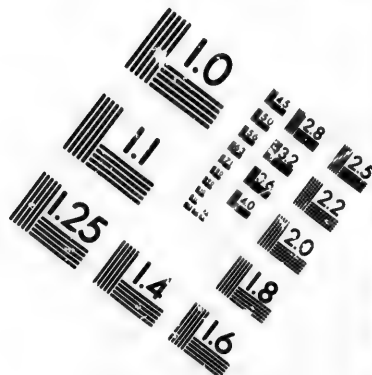
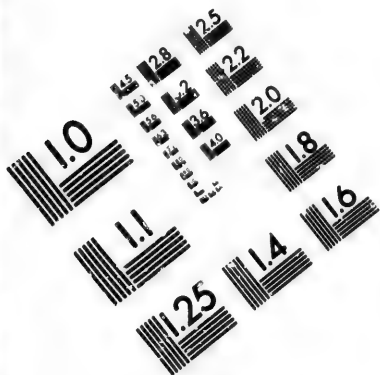
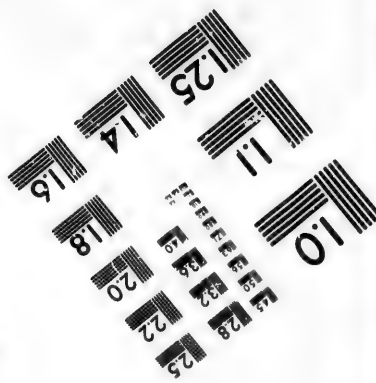
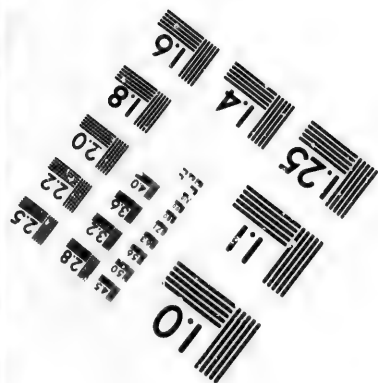
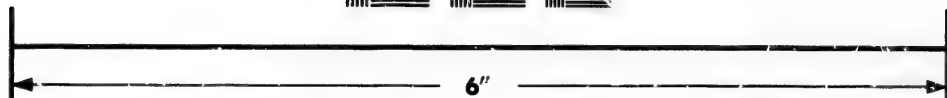
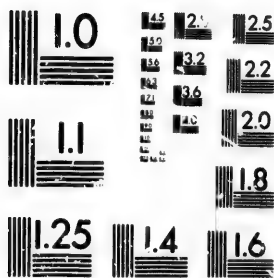


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wide, impartial view of the evidences of Christianity, scarcely touches on the subject of prophecy. Renan tries to overthrow the supernatural character of a prophecy here and there. Many critics are engaged in the same work. In the case of some prophecies they may possibly succeed, but many will remain which we may be certain will turn the edge of their best-tempered tool, and defeat all their efforts to overthrow.

Now, the Scriptures, as you are aware, teem with prophecies; but they were intended for the benefit and encouragement of mankind during very many centuries, and therefore it is absurd to expect that they should all have an evidential value at the present day; that is, that they should all be useful to *us* for proving that the Scriptures were given by inspiration of God. Many persons fall into this mistake, and thus, if at any time they come to think that any book may not have been written quite so early as they supposed, they feel as if the foundations of their faith were slipping away; whereas, most probably, they were never meant to found their faith upon that particular book, the prophecies in which were intended to assure former generations of men.

Now, it is obvious that no prophecy can help prove to us that the Bible is God's book

unless we can prove that the prophecy was publicly recorded before it began to be fulfilled; that it afterwards came to pass; and that its fulfilment was not a coincidence, nor a thing that could be foreseen by the prophet. I propose, therefore, only to allude to what are undisputed prophecies. If in any case modern criticism has attempted to insinuate doubts as to whether a prophecy may not have been written after the event, I will mention the fact, so that you may judge for yourselves whether, even if the whole of modern criticism is substantiated, there are not sufficient undoubtedly fulfilled prophecies left to prove to us that they were given by God Himself.

Let us consider, first, the prophecies relating to the great nations and cities of the world. In the third chapter of Nahum we find a prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh by fire, written undoubtedly long before that event occurred. It reads: "And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste"*; and, further on, "The fire hath devoured thy bars"†; and, "There shall the fire devour thee."‡ The Ninevite remains indicate that this was the way the great city was destroyed. Layard says: "The palace of Kouyunyik had been

* Nahum iii. 7.

† v. 13.

‡ v. 15.

destroyed by fire; the alabaster slabs were almost reduced to lime. The whole entrance of the southwest palace at Nimroud was buried in charcoal"; and Botta says: "I must acknowledge I no longer doubt that this monument (the Khorsabad palace) was destroyed by fire," etc. Nahum ends: "There is no assuaging of thy hurt,"* etc., and Rawlinson says: "In accordance with the announcement of Nahum, we find that Assyria never rose again to any importance."

Isaiah xiii. 19-21 contains a striking prophecy of the desolation of Babylon. It reads: "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldean's pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures."

What is the use of skeptics saying that there may have been two Isaiahs, or twenty Isaiahs? We know that the book was written when the Septuagint version of the Old Testament was composed—that is, two hundred

* v. 19.

years before Christ ; and the prophecy was not completely fulfilled till after Christ, for Keith says : " About the beginning of the Christian era, a small portion of the site of Babylon was inhabited. It became gradually a desert place ; and, in the fourth century, its walls, repaired for that purpose, formed an enclosure for wild beasts, and Babylon was converted into a field for the chase." You remember that Isaiah had said : " But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there." The peculiar point of Isaiah's prophecy was that " It shall never be inhabited." Major Keppel writes : " The eye wanders over a barren desert in which the ruins are nearly the only indication that it had ever been inhabited." Sir Robert K. Porter says : " There are many dens of wild beasts in various parts ; in most of the cavities are numberless bats and owls. These caverns, over which the chambers of majesty may have been spread, are now the refuge of jackals and other savage animals."

The present desolation of Babylon is an existing witness to us of the reality of prophecy. Eligible sites for cities do not usually become desolations after being built over. Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem flourished with Babylon, and they are cities still, because their complete desolation is not foretold in Scripture.

Ezekiel, in his twenty-sixth chapter, prophesied the destruction of Tyre, saying: "And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God." Of the fulfilment of this prophecy Maundrell writes: "Its present inhabitants are only a few poor wretches harbouring themselves in the vaults, and subsisting chiefly upon fishing"; while the skeptic Volney writes: "Tyre is reduced to a miserable village. They live obscurely on the produce of their little ground, and a trifling fishery." But how was Tyre to be humbled? Ezekiel wrote: "And they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust *in the midst of the waters.*" More than two hundred years afterwards this curious prophecy was exactly fulfilled by Alexander, for Diodorus Siculus* records: "Alexander, seeing that it would be a difficult thing to carry on the siege of Tyre, because the city was separated from the continent by an arm of the sea, demolished Old Tyre, as it was then called, and with the stones and fragments of the buildings formed a mole, two hundred feet in breadth, extending from the mainland to the peninsula."

* Vol. XVII., p. 4.

Thus Alexander did precisely what had been foretold, for it must have been necessary to do a great deal of scraping to get the materials for that immense mole.

Ezekiel xxx. 13 contains the prophecy: "There shall be no more a prince out of the land of Egypt." The Encyclopædia says: "Thus miserably fell the monarchy of the Pharaohs, after an unexampled duration of nearly three thousand years, or, as some think, far longer. More than two thousand years have since passed; and, though Egypt has from time to time been independent, *not one native prince has sat on the throne of the Pharaohs.*" In the previous chapter, when speaking of Egypt, Ezekiel said: "It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it any more lift itself up above the nations: and I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations." History recounts the fulfilment of this prophecy, Egypt having been successively ruled by Macedonians, Romans, Moslems, Saracens, Mamelukes, French, Turks, and English. A few weeks ago* a cartoon appeared in *Punch*, representing Mrs. Britannia, pointing to a troopship and saying to the Khedive: "Allow me to inform your Highness, here comes a box of soldiers, which you mustn't play with."

* February 4th, 1893.

The newspapers themselves are a witness to us of the fulfilment of prophecy.

H. L. Hastings has arranged in parallel columns a long list of prophecies such as the above, and acknowledgments of their fulfilment by well-known skeptics. On the other side, it is sometimes urged that the prophecy in Isaiah xvii. 1 was not fulfilled. It reads: "Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." But this is explicable by a temporary desolation such as was actually inflicted by Tiglath-Pileser on the Syrian capital. You will note that Isaiah does not say, as of Babylon: "It shall never be inhabited." He says: "The kingdom shall cease from Damascus," and so it has come to pass.

Let us next take a few of the long series of prophecies which refer to the Messiah, to the Lord and Saviour of mankind, Jesus Christ. And first let me remind you that all these are also *bond fide* prophecies; that is, they were undoubtedly written long before Christ came. Now, how can we be sure of this?

Suppose that it is the duty of two clerks in a bank to keep duplicate ledgers; then one may be almost sure that any series of entries which appears in both ledgers is correct, the only other possible alternative being that the

clerks may have agreed to falsify them. Now, if the two clerks have quarrelled, one may be quite sure that the entries were made before they quarrelled, for in this case collusion is out of question. Now two clerks—the Jewish and the Christian churches—have each been custodians of the Old Testament. Immediately after the prophecies of the Messiah which that book contains were fulfilled they quarrelled, and have been at variance ever since. The Jews maintain that Jesus of Nazareth was not that Messiah. Therefore they had the strongest reason for altering the prophecies so that they should not so pointedly refer to Christ. Such was their respect, however, for their Scriptures that they have left them untouched, and Jews and Christians alike bear witness to the existence of the same Old Testament Scriptures, before Christ came. Further, you will notice that those Scriptures were safeguarded, not by single individuals, but by great churches, and that they existed in two languages, Hebrew and Greek; for the Septuagint version was made two hundred years before Christ. Therefore it is undoubted that the whole of this class of prophecy was written before the event. As we take each part separately, we shall see that all was fulfilled, and that the prophecies were of such a nature that they could not have been the mere guesses of clever men.

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis, God said to Abraham: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Cairns justly asks: "From what construction of history, or from what data in time, could the anticipation of a world-wide spiritual blessing in connection with one man have arisen?" Now this prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes, as the nations of the earth are gradually learning to love the great Son of Abraham, Jesus Christ. The *Illustrated London News* of December 17th, 1892, contained the following statements about Uganda, by the Rev. R. H. Walker, a missionary who had just returned from that country: "Fifteen or sixteen years ago, when Christian missionaries first went to Uganda, there was no written Luganda language. Now, ten thousand of the population, at all events, are able to read their own language. I have already alluded to the stamping out of Uganda as a centre of the slave trade, and with that went other barbarities. In times gone by, women used to make part and parcel of the tribute levied by the king. Then all men took, by force of course, as many wives as they liked, the wives being merely domestic slaves. Polygamy is still the rule with the heathen and Mahometan sections of the community, but a Protestant or Roman Catholic has only one

wife. Mwanga might to-day order his chiefs to have this subject or the other butchered, but his order would not in the least be likely to be obeyed. Mika tells me that he does not quite know where Mwanga got his present wives—in raids in one quarter or another, no doubt—but he says the king is not likely to get any more. Nothing could better show the change which has come about, even in reference to the king and his wives."

After hearing that, who can dispute that even the centre of Africa is beginning to enjoy a few of the many blessings which have come to us through Christ? You are aware that it is occasionally disputed, especially by those who call themselves secularists, that we have been blessed in Christ. Some have prepared a long list of the crimes which have been perpetrated in the name of Christianity, and claim that this list proves that Christ's teaching has rather caused sorrow and injustice than otherwise. But even Renan allows that, though Christians have been intolerant, the spirit of Christ was that of toleration. Consequently, Christ cannot be charged with the crimes done in His name. On the other hand, what we saw of the state of Rome and Greece, when Christ came, should enable us to form a slight conception of the terrible flowing tide of crimes

of all sorts which would have rushed on unchecked had not Christ become, as Renan himself says, "to humanity an inexhaustible source of moral regenerations."* It is easy to tabulate the crimes done in Christ's name, but who shall estimate those He has prevented? Surely every candid person in western Christian lands will gladly acknowledge that we are blessed in Christ.

But even heathen nations have been indirectly blessed through Christ. A Zenana lady recently stated in this city that the British rule was the salvation of India. What if the bulk of our countrymen who rule out there *are* only nominal Christians? We must remember that they are the descendants of the old Bible-reading Puritans, permeated with their ideas; and therefore if British rule be the best that India has ever seen, we may reasonably attribute it to the influence of the Bible, and its great central figure, Jesus Christ, in whom the millions of India are blessed, though they still disbelieve.

Or, take slavery. Did not Christian England pay twenty millions sterling to liberate the slaves in all British dominions? Has not Christian sentiment compelled our government to station cruisers to intercept slavers on the

* Page 370.

east coast of Africa? Who can doubt that this course has lessened the profits to be gained, and thus diminished those terrible raids on harmless villages in the interior, whose inhabitants are thus already indirectly blessed by the coming of a Saviour of whom they have not yet heard? When the great Taeping rebellion was devastating China, was it not a Christian—Gordon—who put it down, and who was actuated by neither love of fame nor money, but only of humanity? Are not Christians striving hard to stop the export of opium to China? Seeing that our missionaries, as well as our statesmen, are exerting a mighty influence all over the globe, may we not truly say that this old prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes?

Next, let us take Genesis xlix. 10. In the Revised Version it reads:

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come;
And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.”

Even the Jews take this as referring to the Messiah, and it contains three statements about Him. First, that He should be born of the tribe of Judah. Now, although there are a few difficulties connected with the genealogy of Christ, there can be no doubt that He came

of the tribe of Judah.* Then the prophecy states that there should be a ruler of the tribe of Judah till Christ came. When our Lord was crucified, the rulership was departing from Judah. After the overthrow of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, the Romans took it away altogether, and the Jews have never regained it. Lastly, the prophecy states that the obedience of the people should be to Christ, or, as the Authorized Version has it, "the gathering of the people"; either expression seeming to imply a voluntary submission to Christ's rule, which would not have come to pass had that temporal kingdom been established, of which the Jews so fondly dreamed.

Passing by the striking Messianic prophecies of Moses,† Balaam,‡ and Nathan,§ let us consider some which refer to more definite events in our Lord's life. Micah v. 2 contains a prophecy that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem. As I have promised to tell you whenever anything is disputed, I must say here that Strauss and Renan declare that Jesus was born at Nazareth, thus charging the Virgin Mary with wilful fraud; for, as she lived after Christ's death, Matthew and Luke can hardly have failed to get the story of the birth at

* Matt. i. 2. Luke iii. 33.

† Deut. xviii. 15. ‡ Numbers xxiv. 17. § II. Sam. vii. 15.

Bethlehem from her. Strauss grants that there is a difficulty in maintaining his theory, considering that the facts were so widely known. Now, as Bethlehem was an obscure village, I think we may accept this as a striking case of fulfilled prophecy.

Next, there are prophecies of a great forerunner, who should be like Elijah,* and whose voice should be heard in the wilderness.† These were, of course, fulfilled in John the Baptist, to whose work Josephus bears independent testimony. I will pass over the prophecies that Christ's ministry should chiefly be in the land of Zebulon,‡ and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; and the prophecies that He should heal the blind, deaf, and lame§; that He should discountenance popular clamour, and not "cry nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street"; that He should be zealous for the honour of God's house¶; that He should ride into Jerusalem upon an ass's colt, amidst rejoicings, etc.|| I will pass over all these most striking prophecies without comment, because it might be contended that Christ fulfilled them on purpose. Let us, therefore, go on to the affecting circumstances

* Mal. iv. 5, 6.

† Isa. xl. 3.

‡ Isa. ix. 1, 2.

§ Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.

¶ Ps. lxix. 9.

|| Zech. ix. 9.

attending His death and passion, because all will allow that He then suffered at the hands of His enemies, who, if they recollected the prophecies at all, had the best of reasons for endeavouring *not* to fulfil them.

Now, when we remember that the brazen serpent in the wilderness was God's way of delivering the Israelites from the snake-bites—whose poison so closely resembles sin—we can scarcely dispute that the lifting up of that serpent in the midst of the camp was a prophecy that the Messiah should be lifted up upon a tree. I say, we can scarcely doubt this, even if we had not St. John's authority that Jesus applied this to Himself when speaking to Nicodemus. As we go on with the prophecies, we shall see that all the details of the crucifixion are filled in, so that we can draw an exact picture of that most cruel form of execution from the Old Testament alone. Now, it cannot be said that the Jews drew this picture for themselves, and that it suggested crucifixion to their minds, for this was a Roman form of punishment, as Renan allows, and it was introduced before the Romans dreamt of studying the Jewish Scriptures.

Here, to bring out the force of the argument, I must quote for you Geikie's description of the sufferings of the crucified. He says: "The

suffering in crucifixion, from which death at last resulted, rose partly from the constrained and fixed position of the body and of the out-stretched arms. Intolerable thirst and ever-increasing pain resulted. The blood, which could no longer reach the extremities, rose to the head, swelled the veins and arteries in it unnaturally, and caused the most agonizing tortures in the brain. As, besides, it could no longer move freely from the lungs, the heart grew more and more oppressed, and all the veins were distended. The weight of the body itself, resting on the wooden pin of the upright beam, the burning heat of the sun scorching the veins, and the hot wind drying up the moisture of the body, made each moment more terrible than the preceding. The numbness and stiffness of the more distant muscles brought on painful convulsions, and slowly extending, sometimes through two or three days, at last reached the vital parts and released the sufferer by death."

Compare this with David's prophecy of it in the 22nd Psalm :

"I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint :
My heart is like wax ;
It is melted in the midst of my bowels.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd ;
And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws ;

And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.
 For dogs have compassed me :
 The assembly of evil-doers have inclosed me :
 They pierced my hands and my feet.
 I may tell all my bones :
 They look and stare upon me."

Now, who can doubt that these two are pictures of the same event, the one put in our own, the other couched in Oriental style?

The psalm continues :

"They part my garments among them,
 And upon my vesture do they cast lots."

As Christ was nailed to the cross, and His disciples standing afar off, I suppose that no one would allege that they had anything to do with the fulfilment of this prophecy.

The same psalm says :

"All they that see me laugh me to scorn :
 They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying :
 Commit thyself unto the Lord : let him deliver him :
 Let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him."

We do not need the testimony of the evangelists to assure us that the Jewish passers-by fulfilled this prophecy with their mocking taunts. Ps. lxi. 21 reads: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The scourging and spitting which prefaced the crucifixion are foretold in Isa. l. 6: "I gave my back to the smiters, and

my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Also in Isa. liii. 5: "But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Zech. xiii. 6 reads: "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds between thine arms? (Margin, hands.) Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

Now, we have seen that the Jews assure us that these prophecies existed long before Christ came. We will turn to another opponent of Christianity—the great French skeptic, Renan—for an acknowledgment that they were literally fulfilled. He says: "Jesus was none the less, from that hour, a condemned man. He remained during the rest of the night exposed to the ill-treatment of a base varletty, who spared him no affront."* "Pilate thought himself obliged to make some concession; but, still hesitating at bloodshed to satisfy people whom he detested, he endeavoured to give the matter a ridiculous turn. Professing to laugh at the pompous title given to Jesus, he caused him to be whipped. Flagellation was the ordinary preliminary of crucifixion."† "Accord-

* Page 332. † Page 338.

ing to Jewish usage, the victims were offered a highly-spiced wine, an intoxicating drink, which from a sentiment of pity was given to the sufferer to stupefy him."* "The cross was first set up, then the prisoner was fastened to it by driving nails through his hands; the feet were often nailed, sometimes merely tied with cords."† "Jesus tasted these horrors in all their atrocity. A burning thirst, one of the tortures of crucifixion, devoured him. He asked for drink. There was at hand a cup of the ordinary drink of the Roman soldiers, a mixture of vinegar and water, called posca. Soldiers had to carry their posca with them in all their expeditions, among which executions were counted. A soldier dipped a sponge in this drink, put it on the end of a reed, and bore it to the lips of Jesus, who sucked it. The thieves were crucified on either side. The executioners, to whom were ordinarily abandoned the minor spoils of criminals, drew lots for his garments, and, seated at the foot of the cross, guarded him."‡ "The passers insulted him. He heard about him vulgar raillery, and his death-cries of anguish turned into hateful mockeries. 'Ah, behold him,' said they. 'He who called himself the son of God! Let his father come now and deliver

* Page 346.

† Page 346.

‡ Page 347.

him, if he will have him.' 'He saved others,' it was muttered, 'himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.'"* "It appears that the two thieves crucified beside him also reviled him."

Thus we see that Renan admits that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the prophecies were fulfilled. Now, did Renan, who is so careful to dispute every supernatural occurrence, make these astonishing admissions through inadvertence, because he forgot about the prophecies? No; he made them because he could not help doing so. All these things were part and parcel of an execution by crucifixion. Therefore, if we accept the testimony of the Roman historian, Tacitus, that Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate, there is no room for doubt that all these things were done to Him. I have classed the above prophecies together because Renan specifically acknowledges their fulfilment; but there are many others which we cannot doubt also literally came to pass.

Zechariah says: "If ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the

* Page 349.

potter : the goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter, in the house of the Lord."* We read the fulfilment of all this in Matthew's Gospel. Again, Isaiah foretold that Christ should not have a fair trial when he said : " By oppression and judgment he was taken away."† The Jews themselves acknowledge the fulfilment of this prophecy, for Geikie says : " So keenly, indeed, has the *judicial* murder of Jesus been felt by the Jewish nation, in later times, that the doctrine was afterwards invented in the Talmud, that any one who gave himself out as a false Messiah could be tried and condemned the same day, or even in the night."

Isaiah also foretold that Christ held His peace before His accusers, for he says : " As a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, yea, he opened not his mouth."

To take events in the order in which they happened, we next find that Zechariah foretold the piercing by a spear.‡

Christ's having been crucified with two thieves, and buried by the rich Joseph of Arimathæa, was prefigured by Isaiah. Lowth translates the well-known verse thus : " And his grave was appointed with the wicked, but

*Zech. xi. 12. †Isa. liii. 8. ‡Zech. xii. 10.

with the rich man was his tomb,"* which, of course, was exactly what came to pass.

Now, neither Renan, nor other modern learned skeptics, deny that we can accept the testimony of the evangelists that these public events really took place, and thus we have altogether a series of prophecies of all the circumstances attending the death of Christ whose fulfilment it is absurd to attribute to mere coincidences. We contend that for all these things to be nothing more than clever guesses, or simply a lot of coincidences, would be a far greater miracle than any which the Scriptures record. Skeptics say that we cannot believe in miracles because modern experience is against them; but is not modern experience equally against the fulfilment of a series of guesses by coincidences such as these? We are therefore convinced that these prophecies were given by inspiration of God, to prove to all men that Jesus of Nazareth was the Saviour whom God had so long promised to redeem sinful man.

From the prophecies of Christ's death and passion, we naturally pass to the prophecies of the general spread of a heartfelt religion, which that death for sinners is now bringing about. Jeremiah xxxi. 33 reads: "I will put my law

* Isa. liii. 9.

in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it ; and I will be their God." Now, in Jeremiah's time, when most people felt religion to be an irksome restraint, what mere man could have foreseen that a time was coming when all true believers should love to serve God, when religion should cease to be a matter of outward ceremonial, and should consist of the inward communion of the heart with God?

Let us next turn to some prophecies in Isaiah ii. and xi.: "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob : and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."* "And the idols shall utterly pass away."† "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."‡ Here we see that the great spread of religion now taking place has been accurately foretold. Even the details are exactly delineated ; for instance, the start of Christian missionaries from Jerusalem, the abolishing of idolatry, and the voluntary submission to Christianity of all the nations among whom the Gospel has been thoroughly preached.

* Isa. ii. 3.

† Isa. ii. 18.

‡ Isa. xi. 9.

And let us remember that the Jew so hated and despised all Gentiles that no Jew was likely to invent such a prophecy.

Well may Dr. Cairns say: "How, then, was the Jewish enthusiasm for the salvation of the world originated in a race in many respects so narrow and limited? How did it survive the damping effect of decay and corruption in their own religion, flourish in exile, and resist the incrustations of local and national sectarianism, till it found a glorious revival in Jesus and His disciples, who were ready to die for its fulfilment, and who actually did begin the fulfilment of it in a wonderful degree? Whence this magnificent ideal of a universal religion totally wanting in paganism; wanting, too, in Mahometanism, except with dependence on brute force and concessions to brutal lust which degrade and ruin it? The Christian church has been struggling—as yet inadequately—for eighteen centuries to realize it; but it fires her warriors still with congenial ardour, and the noblest of them, falling in the field, throws the casket which contains it outward into the region which it is yet to conquer. The greater the soul, the more does it dwell with their spirits and with His who, from the rejection of the cross, looked forth upon a universal empire of truth and love. Is this

enthusiasm and the success which has crowned it soluble upon any principle of unbelief, or has unbelief in itself the moral greatness to suggest an answer?"

Dr. Cairns continues: "The last element of wonder in these prophecies of victory is the shade of delay, reaction, and corruption that blends with success." This you will find in the parable of the tares sown among the wheat, the net cast into the sea which gathered of bad and good, and in the second chapter of second Thessalonians, which speaks of a power of evil within the sanctuary of God. Thus we may well say that to account for all these prophecies, if they were not written by inspiration of God, is one of the standing difficulties of disbelief. That difficulty is increased and rendered insurmountable when we consider the prophecies of the sad state of the Jews during this glorious spread of Gospel truth. In Deuteronomy xxviii. are the following: "Thou shalt be tossed to and fro among all the kingdoms of the earth."* "Thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled always."† "Thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein."‡ "And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all the people whither the Lord shall lead thee away."§ "And the Lord

* V. 25. † V. 29. ‡ V. 30. § V. 37.

shall scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth."* "And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the soul of thy foot."† Those of us who are aware of the history of the Jews—how they have been hunted from one land to another, so that their present exodus from Russia is only the last of a long series—I say, to us further comment is needless; and the marvel is increased when we remember that their remaining a distinct people in spite of these migrations is foretold, for God said by Amos: "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, *yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.*"‡

The great catastrophe which caused the dispersion of the Jews—the terrible siege of Jerusalem, and the final destruction of the Temple—are foretold in many prophecies, the most remarkable being those spoken by our Lord as He sat on the Mount of Olives, and which are recorded by three evangelists.§ St. Luke's account contains these words: "Behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another,

* V. 64. † V. 65. ‡ Amos ix. 9.

§ Matt. xxiv. ; Mark xiii. ; Luke xxi.

that shall not be thrown down.”* “But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand.”† “For there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people.‡ And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”§ And in the nineteenth chapter: “For the days shall come upon thee when thine enemies shall cast up a bank (palisade) about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee.”||

Some skeptics—as Hilgenfeld, Keim, and Hitzig—allow that these were real prophecies; Strauss hesitates, while Renan says of Luke: “Chapter xxi., inseparable from the rest of the work, was certainly written after the siege of Jerusalem, and soon after”; and also he declares: “But if the Gospel of Luke is dated, those of Matthew and Mark are also, for it is certain that the third gospel is posterior to the first.” Thus it will be seen that the learned Renan, after careful inquiry, considers that all three gospels must have been written soon

* V. 6. † V. 20. ‡ V. 23. § V. 24.

|| Luke xix. 43, 44.

after the year 70, when Jerusalem fell. It looks as though he would like to put them at a still earlier date, but is at a loss to account for the existence of the prophecy should he allow that they were written before the siege. As it is, he tries to make out that a history of recent events was put into Christ's mouth as a prophecy.

It is hard to believe this, for several reasons. Now, suppose you pick up Hake's "Chinese Gordon," which contains no account of his last mission to Khartoum and glorious death there. You rightly conclude that it must have been written while he was still alive. For precisely the same reason we conclude that the Acts must have been written while St. Paul was still alive; otherwise St. Luke would never have omitted to chronicle the martyrdom which consummated the life of his principal hero.

Now, we know that St. Paul was beheaded under Nero, while Jerusalem was taken at the time of Vespasian, who reigned after Nero. Also, we know that St. Luke's Gospel was written before the Acts; and hence we can be sure that either St. Luke wrote his gospel before the taking of Jerusalem, or else committed fraud somewhere. However, we must not lay much stress upon this, for it is an argument

based on omission. But, if these prophecies were written after the event, why is no hint anywhere dropped that the prophecy was fulfilled, in like manner as Luke, who, after relating the prophecy of a dearth by Agabus, adds: "Which came to pass in the days of Claudius"?* If the three evangelists agreed to impute the prophecy to Christ, and left out any notice of its fulfilment on purpose, they showed a low cunning of which the gospels bear no other trace.

Again, why is the prophecy of the end of the world mixed up with that of the destruction of Jerusalem? Surely, if the authors were writing after the latter event, they would have managed to keep these two subjects separate. Again, why are the warnings to leave Jerusalem put in? Because, if the people were *not* warned, their friends would surely object to the evangelists stating that they were warned, and consequently ought to have left the city. And, lastly, what possible motive had the evangelists for what must in this case, if skeptics are right, have been a wilful and deliberate fraud?

We may, therefore, well claim these as prophecies. History tells us how literally they were fulfilled. Eusebius relates how, after

* Acts xi. 28.

Jerusalem had been first "compassed with armies"—that is, invested—Cestius Gallas withdrew his army, and then the Christians, remembering the Lord's words, retired to Pella in Perea, and so escaped destruction. Josephus says that when Vespasian besieged Jerusalem, Titus in three days built a wall of thirty-nine furlongs, having thirteen castles in it, and so cut off all escape; and then, when the town had fallen after awful sufferings, Titus having commanded his soldiers to dig up the city, this was so fully done by levelling the whole compass of it, except three towers, that they who came to see it were persuaded that it would never be built again. It is said that over a million Jews perished in this siege.

Here we come to another difficulty of disbelief, and it is this: If the detailed prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem were written before the event, how came any mortal man to foresee so clearly what was going to happen? If they were written after, why is there no hint that they were fulfilled? Why are they left mixed up with other matters? And what possible motive had the evangelists for the fraud?

However, there is another prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem which was certainly written before the event. It is in Deuteronomy

xxviii.: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young . . . And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall straiten thee."

Josephus relates how these horrible things came to pass. The nation of fierce countenance, whose speech they should not understand, must refer to the Romans, for in earlier sieges the Jews had said: "Speak to thy servants in the Syrian language, for we understand it,"* and there is no doubt that many also understood Chaldean. Now, if it be contended that all these prophecies were written by a series of clever men, who guessed that they would come to pass at some time or other, and that, if true prophecies, they would have treated of fewer events in greater detail,

* II. Kings xviii. 26.

let us remember that then a difficulty would have arisen as to which event was meant. But, fortunately, we can silence this objection forever by pointing to the prophecies of the death of Christ. They cluster so thickly round that greatest of events that every detail was accurately foretold, and thus satisfy us, not only that it is a sure word of prophecy which our Bible contains, but that by far the most important event in the Bible is the death of Christ. Many men nowadays extol Christ's life as a pattern we all ought to copy, and imply, or even state, that His death was of minor importance. The whole drift of Scripture is against such an interpretation, and shows us that the atonement Christ has purchased for us is infinitely more important than even the beautiful, perfect example He has set us.

As the title of this address has directed our special attention to prophecies whose fulfilment we can watch at the present day, let us, before concluding, speak for a few moments of the prophecies of the "time of the end," or the "last days."

What are the main characteristics of the present times? First, as to our mode of life. Our wonderful recent inventions have almost all been directed to facilitating travelling, or

to researches into the physical sciences. Our discoveries have vastly increased our knowledge in all directions. There is no end to the 'ologies. The result of inventions and discoveries is that we travel much more than we used to do, that our knowledge is deeper and also much more diffused among the people. Two and a half decades of centuries ago, God said to Daniel: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: *many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*"* It is said that on the strength of this prophecy the great Christian philosopher, Sir Isaac Newton, ventured to predict that men would travel at the rate of fifty miles an hour, a hundred and fifty years before railways were invented. Voltaire got hold of these words, and said: "Now, look at the mighty mind of Newton, who discovered gravitation! When he became an old man and got into his dotage, he began to study the book called the Bible, and it seems, in order to credit its fabulous nonsense, we must believe that the knowledge of mankind will be so increased that we shall be able to travel at fifty miles an hour. The poor dotard!" Comment on the above is needless.

Again, what are the characteristics of the

* Dan. xii. 4.

present age as regards the state of society? Are we not chiefly remarkable for our violent endeavours to make money by all possible means, covered by a show of churchgoing on Sunday, which outward profession of religion seems to have very little practical effect on the lives of most people? St. Paul prophesied: "But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof."*

Again, what is the state of religious thought? Is it not chiefly remarkable for lack of faith, even among true Christians,† and the general spread of skepticism, taking the form of scoffing and often immoral infidelity among the uneducated, and a denial of the supernatural among the educated? The doctrine of Christ's second coming is especially scouted. St. Peter prophesied: "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?"‡

You will note that in each case the prophecies have only been fulfilled within the last

* II. Tim. iii. 1, 2, 4, 5. † Luke xviii. 8. ‡ II. Peter iii. 3.

century. Does not this prove to us that *we* have come to the "time of the end"? and, as we watch the missionaries steadily penetrating into the darkest corners of the earth, should we not constantly bear in mind our Lord's words: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; *and then shall the end come*"? *

Finally, let me draw your attention to the fact that we can watch the fulfilment of God's promises. Bible-loving nations are now the leading nations of the world. If you would see the proof of this fact, enquire which nations give birth to most inventions, and the most remarkable books; which nations were in a position to demand "spheres of influence" in the recent partition of Africa; which nations are now endeavouring to maintain the peace of the world, and thus proving their conscious strength. Are they not England, America, and Germany? How does the skeptic account for this? We Christians say it is because "Righteousness exalteth a nation."†

If sound reason cannot accord with belief in the Scriptures, how is it that so many prominent men in our days have been sincere Christians? For instance, I will take those of

* Matt. xxiv. 14. † Prov. xiv. 34.

my own profession, as its remarkable men are most familiar to me. Why was every flag in New York harbour lowered to half-mast when news arrived of the death of Sir Henry Havelock? Why did crowds attend at Richmond to see General Jackson's body lying in state? Why did the German Emperor exclaim, when he heard that the pious Moltke was dead: "I have lost a whole army!"? Why did the British House of Commons, by an angry murmur, force Mr. Gladstone to add an eulogy, when he was casually mentioning the name of General Gordon? Why did two members of the Royal family, and all the available distinguished officers of the British army, go down to Chatham to be present at the unveiling of Gordon's statue—when the band played his favourite hymn, "Forever with the Lord"? Was it not because God has said: "Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed"?*

* I. Sam. ii. 30.



The Credibility of Christianity and the
Difficulties of Disbelief.

ADDRESS NO. IV.

The Reality of Miracles.



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THE REALITY OF MIRACLES.

IN the second address of this course, we first considered a series of the strongest possible reasons for believing in the existence of a personal God. We then turned to history, and learnt that the greatest misery and wretchedness prevailed under the most splendid civilizations of ancient times. From these facts we concluded that God would grant a revelation to make His will known to His creatures, in order that their sad condition should be alleviated, and that they should learn to look up to the Giver of the blessings they would then begin to really enjoy. In the third address we considered some still more positive evidence that such a God exists, from the fact that He caused many prophecies to be written, the fulfilment of which we can watch with our own eyes.

The question before us now is this: Would the fulfilment of these prophecies alone suffice to convince mankind that the book in which they stand is the Word of God, containing His revelation to man? We answer: Their number and variety ought to suffice to convince *us*;

but, inasmuch as many of them have only recently attained fulfilment, we cannot argue that they ought to have convinced former generations of men. But was it necessary that such should be convinced? Certainly, it was at least necessary that the candid-minded people of former ages should have been offered something to base their faith upon. We live in a favoured age, but have no reason to believe that the good things of the world were intended for us alone.

What means were open to the Almighty for use in convincing the ancient Jews and early Christians of the truth of the revelation He was making to them?

In the second address we saw that, when God planned and established the laws of the universe, His control over them was so absolute that He was able also to establish a remarkable exception to a certain very general law. He decreed that water should expand as it cooled from 40° to 32° , in spite of the general law that cooling bodies should contract. How could this power be utilized for the above-mentioned purpose, to convince people who knew next to nothing of the general laws of the universe? Clearly, only by making the exceptions temporary, so that the uneducated should see that they were exceptions; and very striking, so

that the mind of man should be constrained to admit that what he witnessed could be the work of none but God. It was for this purpose that God caused miracles to be worked.

Many persons, in recent times, have considered that miracles are rather a hindrance than a help to believing in Christianity, and have imagined that they would serve the cause of Christ by explaining away what were undoubtedly supernatural occurrences on natural lines. The reason why this has been done so much lately is because of the immense progress of science, which has shown us that our universe is governed by fixed laws, which have been in operation for an inconceivable length of time. We have gradually come to believe that every phenomena in the physical universe is governed by law, and that these laws have remained unchanged for countless ages. Hence the difficulty of believing that exceptions to law—that is, miracles—have ever occurred.

But here we must remember that, if the physical universe is so governed by law that we can certainly predict what will happen if we know all the circumstances, the moral universe is not subject to any such exact laws. Even if you were told everything that is going to happen for the next twenty-four hours, you could not predict what mood you will then be

in, for things that worry us one day do not do so another. Still less can you predict the mood another person will be in. In fact, in the moral world there seems to be a perpetual conflict going on between good and evil, and it is impossible to certainly foresee how it will end in any particular person, even if they be of fixed character and opinions. Still more difficult is it to make a guess as to how persons who are wavering between good and evil will decide to act in any given circumstances. People do not always obey the strongest motive. They often do grievous wrong when all their interest is to do right ; and they sometimes have the courage to choose the right when it appears as if all their interests are to do wrong. Thus we see that the moral universe does not obey fixed, immutable laws; and now we come to the point.

The miracles of the Bible were all performed for moral and not physical purposes; and hence the immutability of physical laws is no argument against miracles performed for moral purposes, unless it be argued that the Almighty Creator of the universe had not the power to cause exceptions to take place in the working of His own laws. That the miracles of the Bible were performed for moral purposes is obvious from their grouping, they

having always taken place when some great reformers—as Moses and his servant Joshua, Elijah and his servant Elisha, or Christ and His servants Peter and Paul—were endeavouring to effect a great moral reformation among the people.

On this part of the subject Dr. Cairns says: “Besides, it is to be remembered that while in one sense miracles set aside law, in another and deeper sense they uphold it. The end of miracle through the coming and works of Christ is the restoration of moral order. The coming of Christ as a sinless being is a miracle. Christianity is not an ordinary history, or even a great moral system incorporated with the life of its founder. It is, if it is anything, a system of redemption, based on the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, with a sequel of eternal results and issues, greater through union with Christ, or separation from Him, than the ordinary immortality with its hopes and fears. This scheme is wrought out by the life and death, the dominion and influence, the second coming to judgment and endless reign of Jesus Christ. Now, this whole plan and system transcends natural laws, in any common acceptation of the word. It is believed to be in harmony with the highest laws of the

divine nature, and to be the most glorious expression of them. But it is born of and lives by miracle, so that to refuse faith in this is to make sin the order of the universe. And if Christ needed to displace physical law in order to vindicate and restore moral and spiritual law, the conception of the universe which would exclude this interference is really a materialistic superstition, and, so far from exalting God as the God of order, it surrounds Him and His creatures with an outward barrier that shuts the way even to the 'tree of life.' It is by dwelling on the order of nature without that a prejudice against miracles has been created. A glance at the disorder of nature within restores the balance, and, with the need, recalls the probability of a remedy, and of a remedy attended by miracle."

The case seems to stand thus: Certain learned men are so occupied with their scientific studies that the science of the *physical* universe bounds their mental horizon; therefore when they think of miracles they unconsciously assume that, if performed at all, they must have been intended to amend the only universe they have truly realized, namely, the physical universe; and they have such a strong sense of the wonderful adaptation of natural laws to carry on the operations of the physical universe

without any break that to say a miracle was worked seems to them like a confession that the laws of nature were originally imperfect. But you will observe that this misapprehension of some scientific men arises entirely from their thinking only of the physical sciences, whose laws are constant, and ignoring the moral sciences, whose laws are inconstant, and at the same time forgetting that the Christian miracles are alleged to have been worked for moral and not for physical purposes.

In every locomotive there is a heavy lever called the reversing lever. It is not required for the ordinary and straightforward running of the train, which may go thousands of miles without its being used. Why is it provided then? It is a power reserved in the hands of the engine-driver, for use in case of emergencies, to prevent things going from bad to worse. For instance, if danger threatens on the line, he reverses his engine, and, backing his train into a safe position, avoids a catastrophe. When the lever is hauled over, the same forces act through the same mechanism, but the result is very different. We believe that the working of miracles is a power reserved in the hands of the Almighty for similar purposes.

But we have also to deal with literary critics of miracles. We are informed that Strauss, Baur, and Renan all disbelieved in miracles; and that if such learned critics as they were concluded that nothing supernatural ever occurred, then we, whose learning cannot attain to theirs, are told that we should be willing to follow their example. To this we may reply, in the first place, that, just as more scientific men have believed than disbelieved, so far more learned literary critics have considered that there is sufficient evidence to prove the occurrence of miracles than have thought the testimony insufficient or unreliable; and, in the second place, that we cannot allow that either Strauss, Baur, or Renan were unprejudiced judges whose verdicts we may well be content to follow, because all three seem to have started their investigations with a conviction that no miracles had occurred—thus begging the question at the outset.

Strauss says that the main difficulty in accepting the gospels as historical is that they assume the existence of a personality in our Lord, and recognize the operation of powers in the course of His life to which we have no parallel in any other history. And, again, he says: "That which cannot happen, did not happen."*

* Das Leben Jesu für das Deutsche Volk bearbeitet. 3rd edition. Page 145.

Baur says: "The cardinal argument for the later origin of our gospels remains always this, that each of them for itself, and still more all of them together, relate so much in the life of Jesus in a manner in which, in reality, it is impossible for it to have happened."*

Renan says: "But the question of the supernatural is decided for us with a complete certainty by this single reason, that there is no room for believing in a thing of which the world does not offer any experimental trace."†

Thus it will be seen that all three really beg the question; that is, before investigating the evidence as to whether the miracles happened or not, they give decided opinions that they cannot have happened. Now, whenever reasonable people want to get at the truth of a question, they take care to choose unprejudiced judges. The Army Act lays down that "the officer who investigated the charges on which a prisoner is arraigned shall not . . . sit on the court martial for the trial of such prisoner"; and it is further explained that this is ordered because his doing so might have "led him to form a conclusion on the merits

* Kritische Untersuchungen über die Kanauschen Evangelien. 1847. Page 530.

† Life of Jesus. 13th edition. Page 9.

of the case.”* Again: “The officer ordering trial should be careful to avoid any expression of opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the prisoner,”† it being always considered in the Army that such an opinion should be based on evidence alone, and that premature conclusions are to be carefully avoided. In the above-mentioned passages, Strauss, Baur, and Renan betrayed the fact that they formed foregone conclusions about miracles apart from the evidence, so transgressing the common rules of inquiry into truth; and our minds, therefore, may well refuse to be influenced by the verdict they arrived at, even while we gladly avail ourselves of their learning on subordinate parts of the inquiry.

But besides the scientific and literary, there have been also historic critics of miracles.

About the year 1820, George Stephenson met with certain gentlemen to talk over a proposed railway between Stockton and Darlington, which he desired to work by steam locomotives instead of horses, assuring them that he had done this successfully at Newcastle with the now famous “Puffing Billy.” Now, Hume advises us to reject miracles as contrary to experience, while it is not contrary to experience that testimony should be false. (He

* Manual of Military Law. † Queen’s Regulations.

means, of course, *our* experience ; for, to assume that the experience of all men has always been against miracles is to beg the question.) Now, suppose those gentlemen had acted on Hume's principles, they would have refused to listen to Stephenson ; and, if every one had acted like them, railways would never have come into general use. What they very rightly did was to resolve to examine the evidence, and, having done so, they came to the conclusion that Stephenson could not himself be deceived, for he had practically tested the matter at Newcastle, and that he had no sufficient motive for deceiving others, because then he would have run such risk of detection.

Now, in the case of miracles, we know that the evangelists and early Christians had no motive for deceiving, seeing that they gave up their positions, families, comforts, and lives to the propagation of a Gospel which enjoined the abandonment of lying and every evil habit at whatever cost. The only practical question now is: Were the people deceived? If they were not, then miracles must have happened ; and therefore a most determined effort has been made in modern times to throw discredit upon their testimony. For instance, in "Robert Elsmere," the contention is put somewhat thus : "They really, poor men, could not be

expected to relate what they saw correctly, seeing that they knew nothing about the great science of history as we now understand it." You are aware that great concessions can be obtained from most men by the aid of a little flattery. In the above, the flattery is no less effective because it is thinly veiled. The plain truth is that the great science of history, as we now understand it, seems to be the science of drawing inductions from facts as the author goes along, and choosing facts which powerfully support those inductions.

St. John was the only one of the evangelists who seems to have written in support of any definite theory. Why the fact that St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke wrote plain, unvarnished tales makes their evidence as to facts less credible is a very difficult thing to understand. On the contrary, it appears very fortunate that they did *not* understand the science of history as we practise it; because if they had we might have suspected them, with more reason, of twisting facts to prove what they wished.

But, then, objectors say that all the early founders of Christianity were such very simple people that they would believe anything, and never dreamt of suspecting fraud, or even misapprehensions, anywhere. The truth is that

they lived in such a wicked age that probably they were more habitually on the watch for deception than we are; and this fact is further proved by St. Peter's saying, in his second epistle: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables."* Now, if the early Christians had been an unsuspecting folk, it is certain that Peter would never have written this, for it would have been suggesting a doubt to their minds. And surely, too, when becoming a Christian meant an entire change of life, and a possibility of martyrdom, it seems only reasonable to suppose that men must have examined and weighed the evidence on which they were called to give up everything. Neither let it be said that the founders of Christianity were merely uneducated fishermen. St. Matthew was a customs-house officer, St. Luke a doctor of medicine, St. John was "known unto the high priest," and St. Paul had received the best education which that ancient centre of learning, Jerusalem, could afford.

"Oh, but," say the skeptics, "people in those days were so constantly on the lookout for miracles that it was easy to persuade them that the most ordinary occurrence was a miracle; in fact, they expected miracles of every teacher or reformer."

* II. Peter i. 16.

THIS, however, hardly appears from history. The great crop of miracles which are said to have been worked during the dark ages were, of course, due to this cause—they being copied from Christ's. But, beyond a few miracles alleged to have been performed in Rome and Greece, there is very little to show that people were expecting miracles when Christ came. On the contrary, the Romans and Greeks, at least, were getting very skeptical about them, and even in Palestine the age of miracles seemed to have ceased, for the Scriptures contain no record of any having been worked for over five hundred years. Neither did they necessarily expect miracles of every reformer: for they said of John the Baptist, the mighty teacher in the wilderness, "John did no miracle," and this statement is confirmed by Josephus.

Thus there seems to be no reason to doubt that the early Christians were matter-of-fact, fairly-educated men, not necessarily expecting that the series of miracles which had been discontinued for five hundred years should be immediately resumed, nor refusing to listen to a teacher because he worked no miracles. Now, suddenly Christianity sprang into existence, and spread with wonderful rapidity into countries far and near. This fact can be

proved by outside evidence—from Pliny's famous letter to Trajan, written from Asia Minor, only seventy years after Christ's death, in which he says: "There are many of every age, and of both sexes; nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but smaller towns also, and the open country"; and he adds that the temples were "almost deserted."

Thus the fact of the very rapid spread of Christianity is undeniable. How can we account for it?

It has been my good fortune to meet with several excellent men of most attractive character in the course of my life; but their good influence on others was not so markedly effective as to show that the beauty of Christ's character and teaching alone may have caused the faith He founded to spread so rapidly against all sorts of obstacles and persecutions. If this letter of Pliny's stood by itself, it would give us a strong presumption that Christianity was founded on unimpeachable miracles; for, if not, skepticism will always find an insurmountable difficulty in accounting for its rapid spread at a time when men could inquire of eye-witnesses as to the truth of the alleged occurrences.

Before commencing the direct argument for

miracles, we claim that the Bible itself is a miracle, even if we start with no theory of its inspiration. Where, in the world, is there another book like it? Take the Koran, of which the skeptic, Gibbon, says: "The divine attributes exalt the fancy of the Arabian missionary, but his loftiest strains must yield to the sublime simplicity of the Book of Job, composed in a remote age, in the same country, and in the same language." Where is there another book of which we should be willing to acknowledge that all the inquiry of the ages has not searched out its illimitable depths? Do we not assemble at our churches every Sunday in the expectation that new truths will be brought for our edification out of its inexhaustible storehouse? Are not new books about the Bible continually being published? In a word, every book written by man can be fathomed by man; but this book the wisest of men cannot altogether fathom, and we therefore feel certain that its authorship is not of man.

Now, with regard to the direct evidence that miracles were actually performed, we have, first of all, St. Paul's statements in those epistles which even French, German, and English skeptics allow to be undoubtedly genuine—namely, Romans, I. and II. Corinthians, and Galatians. Renan speaks of these as "incontestables et

incontestées" * (indisputable and undisputed), and he adds that "the most severe critics, such as Christian Baur, accept them without objection." Laing, speaking of St. Paul, says: "There is no doubt that he was an historical person who lived at the time and in the manner described in the Acts of the Apostles, and that the Epistle to the Corinthians is a genuine letter written by him." †

In these undoubtedly authentic epistles he says: "In the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Ghost; so that from Jerusalem, and round about even unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." ‡ While, in II. Cor. xii. 12, he says: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs, and wonders, and mighty works"; and in I. Cor. xii. 10: "And to another workings of miracles" (margin, "powers"). Now, would St. Paul have dared to write thus if not only he himself, but his converts in Asia Minor had not been firmly persuaded that he worked signs and wonders? Would he not have run the greatest risk of being contradicted by some traveller in Rome or Corinth, who would have said: "I heard

* Saint Paul, pp. 5, 6.

† Modern Science and Modern Thought. Page 133.

‡ Rom. xv. 19.

Paul preach in Asia Minor, but never heard of his having worked miracles" ?

Now, although not quite so undisputed by skeptics, Christians can be equally certain that the Acts were written by a companion of St. Paul. I hope to touch on the evidence for this in the next address; but, for the present, it may be sufficient to say that the learned French skeptic, Renan, allows its force. He says: "I persist in believing that the final composition of the Acts of the Apostles is due to the disciple of St. Paul who says 'we' in the last chapters." He further considers that the tradition is correct according to which this disciple is St. Luke. Now, you will notice that the "we" is used in the Acts before St. Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, as well as during the memorable voyage and shipwreck; for Acts xxi. 15 runs: "And after these things *we* took up our baggage, and went up to Jerusalem." Thus we may be sure that within thirty years (at longest) of the time that the miracles recorded in the beginning of the Acts were worked their historian visited Jerusalem, and made the acquaintance, both of the agents and witnesses of those miracles.

Before we enter upon the question as to whether St. Paul or St. Luke were deceived about these miracles, let us again for a moment

contemplate the idea of their being themselves deceivers.

You will remember that St. Paul wrote to his converts: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings."* Now, the difficulty of believing that the man who wrote this was himself a liar is further increased by the fact that in another epistle he added sound reasons for thus forbidding lying; for to the Ephesians he wrote: "Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour: for we are members one of another."† And it becomes a moral impossibility to believe that St. Paul was a deceiver, when we remember all he gave up, did, and suffered for the cause of the world's greatest teacher of truth, Jesus Christ.

Thus we cannot believe that St. Paul, or his companion, St. Luke, were deceivers. Now, can they have been deceived?

I have heard my mathematical master remark that St. Paul's epistles contained specimens of the finest reasoning he had ever met with. Any one reading those epistles must agree that St. Paul had a most acute and well-balanced mind; and that, while it is hard to believe that he was taken in by the other

* Col. iii. 9. † Eph. iv. 25.

apostles, to believe that he thought that he had himself worked miracles, when he had done nothing of the sort, is altogether impossible. Here we come to another difficulty of disbelief, which is this: How does it account for the fact that St. Paul, who insisted on truth-telling, and gave up everything for the Gospel of truth, claimed in authentic letters that he had worked miracles, if he really had done nothing of the kind?

Before entering upon the proof that Jesus Christ worked miracles, we must briefly glance at our reasons for believing that the four gospels in our Bible were written by the men whose names they bear, and at a very early age of the Christian era. The Gospel of St. John is the one most disputed by all skeptics. We saw in our last address that Renan considers that the first three gospels must have been written soon after the year 70. As we have not time to go into the proof for all the gospels, let us only consider the case of the one most disputed, relying upon the opinion of the learned Renan as regards the others. And in so doing we rest upon no insecure foundation, for we may be quite sure that neither Renan nor any other skeptic would admit the early date of any of the gospels if they could possibly help it. For to say that Matthew,

Mark, and Luke were written soon after the year 70 is to say that they were received as correct accounts about forty years after Christ's death, when many persons must still have been living who perfectly remembered the events of His three years' ministry, and who would at once have contradicted any false statement of the evangelists. Therefore, if Renan allows that they were written at such an early date, we may be sure that he does so because the evidence is so overwhelming that he cannot help himself.

Now, with regard to St. John's Gospel; you are aware that its author avoids mentioning the name John, as far as possible. This can only be for one of two reasons; either it was John who wrote it, and he omitted mentioning his own name from natural modesty; or else the real author omitted John's name to make it appear that the book was written by John—in fact, committed a cunning fraud.

So far, Renan agrees, saying: "Either the author of the fourth gospel is a disciple of Jesus, an intimate disciple, attached to him from the earliest moment; or else the author has employed, for the purpose of giving himself authority, an artifice which has been followed from the beginning of the book to the end, and which was designed to make it believed that

he was a witness in the best position possible for reporting the truth of the events."

Therefore we have just to choose between believing that the gospel was written by John, or a forger. Why do we believe that it was written by John? In the first place, we have the concurrent testimony of all the early Christian church. That does not sound very convincing, but it is really a very strong argument. For instance: There lived with John himself a man named Polycarp. During a persecution in A.D. 167, at Smyrna, Asia Minor, the pro-consul urged him thus: "Swear, curse Christ, and I release thee." Polycarp nobly replied: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me nothing but good, and how could I curse Him, my Lord and Saviour?" He was then burnt to death, and his martyrdom for truth may well convince us that he would not be a party to palming off a forged gospel upon us.

Now, only thirteen years after, Polycarp's pupil, Irenæus, wrote: "Then John, the disciple who rested on the Lord's bosom, also published his gospel whilst he remained at Ephesus, in Asia." Now, supposing that the gospel was forged during those thirteen years, surely Irenæus would have said: "Polycarp never told me of the existence of this gospel,

and he was installed as bishop by John himself, and must have known if it existed." It would be still more difficult to get a forged gospel to be received as John's while Polycarp was alive.

Now, when we say that we have the concurrent testimony of the early Christian church, it means that we have a number of arguments like this, which all combine to prove that the gospel was written by John. Besides, by A.D. 180, before which time the gospel was certainly written, a number of sects existed in the church, some of which had come into existence in St. John's time, and all but one insignificant sect agreed that the fourth gospel was written by St. John. That one sect allowed that it was written at Ephesus, during St. John's life.

Now, consider the difficulty of passing off a forged book as written by St. John. Do you think that, if some military man were to write an account of the commencement of the siege of Sebastopol, he could pass it off as having been written by Lord Raglan? Why, people who had friends in the siege would show up its mistakes again and again. And what possible motive could he have had for the forgery? If he said, "I have found a gospel written by St. John, and I want a large sum of

money for it," don't you think the church would have looked upon it with double suspicion?

What a beautiful gospel is that according to St. John! How naturally the incidents are related! How dramatic it is in some places! how pathetic in others! how sublime towards the end! Poor Renan altogether fails to appreciate the wonderful conversations related in it; but those who can sympathize at all with the leading Character simply cannot believe that this remarkable book is the work of a forger—yet, as Renan says, it must have been either a forger, or else St. John himself, who wrote it.

But what is there to be said on the other side, to prove that St. John did not write this gospel? The English agnostic, Laing, remarks that Papias did not seem to know about it in the second century. Skeptics are very fond of arguing from omissions. Because a man omits to mention a fact, they generally assume that he knew nothing about it; whereas there are dozens of other ways of explaining an omission, which can prove nothing. In this case, Laing's argument is demolished by Renan, who says: "The first epistle also, attributed to St. John, is certainly by the same author as the fourth gospel. Now, the epistle is iden-

tified as St. John's by Polycarp, Papias, and Irenæus."*

Then Laing raises a number of further objections, due to his not realizing that the Synoptic Gospels relate Christ's ministry among the Galilæan peasants, while St. John relates His controversies with the Jews of Jerusalem. The skeptic Renan again disposes of the objection by pointing out in a footnote several cases in which the first three evangelists allude to visits to Jerusalem, or to people who lived there. †

Thus we come to another difficulty of disbelief (which applies to other books besides this). It is: If the fourth gospel was not

† See, especially, Luke xiii. 34.

* I give Laing's argument here in full, as an instance of the unreasonableness of skeptical special pleading:

"This testimony of Papias is very valuable and very instructive. In the first place, it seems conclusive that the Gospel of John was not known to him, and not received in the early Christian churches of Asia Minor as a work of authority. Had it been so received, Papias must have known of it, brought up, as he was, at the feet of men who had been John's disciples, and bishop of a church closely connected with those of which, if there is any faith in tradition, John had been the patriarch and principal founder. And if he had known of such a written gospel as that of St. John, and believed it to have been really written by the 'beloved disciple,' the apostle second only—if second—to St. Peter, it is inconceivable that he should have expressed such an unqualified preference for oral tradition, and made such an almost contemptuous reference to written docu-

written by the Apostle John, how did its forger succeed in passing it off as John's? What did he gain by so doing? And how is it that we find so many quarrelling sects attributing it to St. John before the close of the second century?

Hence we may well believe that the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John were written by eye-witnesses, and St. Mark and St. Luke by friends of eye-witnesses, of the occurrences which they relate. Now, these gospels are full of miracles, and therefore the question is: Were these really supernatural occurrences? Only one bears the slightest resemblance to a conjuring trick—that is, the turning water into wine. But you must remember that conjurors do not usually work with your own common

ments. He must have said: 'For, with the exception of the gospel of the blessed John, I found that little was to be got from books.'"

Would not any one judge, from this extract, that we were in possession of such considerable writings of Papias as to make his failure to quote St. John's Gospel, if it existed, very remarkable? But what is the true state of the case? Only a short fragment of Papias' writings has been preserved, and "there is nothing to prove that in other portions of his writings, now lost, this father may not have quoted the fourth gospel." And what if he did prefer oral tradition? Remember that in Papias' youth some men who had actually seen Christ were probably still alive. Every court of justice prefers verbal to written testimony. You can cross-examine a witness in a way that you cannot cross-examine a book.

household articles, and make you perform all the trick yourselves without your knowing how it is done. Yet this miracle was performed with the common water-pots, and by the servants of the house.

With the exception of this, feeding the multitudes, and stilling the storms, the miracles of our Lord were mainly miracles of healing. This, of course, was on account of the divine compassion of our Saviour's character; but Renan avails himself of the fact to imply that the people were easiest imposed upon in this way, on account of the absence of medical science in those days. Renan's explanation is one very likely to go down at the present time, proud, as we are, of our advances in medicine and surgery, as in all other sciences. Of our Saviour's time, Renan says: "In such a condition of knowledge, the presence of a superior man, treating the sick with gentleness, and giving him by some sensible signs the assurance of his recovery, is often a decisive remedy."* This sounds very plausible, but have you ever known or heard of any one who could cure serious illness in this way? That the illnesses were serious is proved by Luke the physician's diagnosis of them. The explanation seems to be altogether inadequate to account for the

* Life of Jesus. Pp. 232, 233.

facts of the case. Besides, it does not in the least explain the cleansing of the loathsome leprosy, opening the eyes of the blind, healing people without going near them, as in the case of the nobleman's son and centurion's servant ; far less does it explain the raising of the dead, which, it is claimed, Christ did on three different occasions.

Wisely does Renan devote only one chapter to a general explanation of how he imagines people came to believe that Christ worked miracles! Had he treated each case separately, he would have involved himself in endless difficulties. For, let us briefly consider the raising of Lazarus, which is almost the only miracle of which Renan speaks in detail. After showing that the story cannot have sprung from a mere legend, Renan says: "Perhaps Lazarus, still pale from his sickness, caused himself to be swathed in grave clothes, as one dead, and shut up in his family tomb. . . . Jesus desired to see once more him whom he had loved, and, the stone having been removed, Lazarus came forth."*

If this explanation were correct, of course Martha and Mary would have known of the proposed deception, and then, when Jesus met Martha and said to her, "Thy brother shall

* Life of Jesus. Page 305.

rise again,"* would not Martha have replied, "Yes, if you call him to life," instead of petulantly saying, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection, at the last day"? Again, would Mary's grief have been sufficiently natural to deceive? Again, would Martha have dared to state before all the people that her brother had been dead four days? Again, at the supper at Bethany, would Mary have acted in the manner which Renan describes thus: "Finally, carrying the manifestations of her worship to extremes hitherto unknown, she prostrated herself, and wiped the feet of her master with her long hair"?† If Mary and Martha had known that Lazarus had never died, we cannot believe that they would have acted thus; neither can we believe that the *whole* story is false, on account of the numerous natural touches which it contains.

To give a reasonable account of the origin of the story of the raising of Lazarus is another of the standing difficulties of disbelief.

Having dealt with the case which Renan chooses, let us select a case for detailed consideration. We will take that of the man born blind—perhaps the most lifelike story in all literature. It is related in the ninth chapter of St. John's Gospel:

* John xi. 23. † Life of Jesus. Page 314.

And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth.

And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?

Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents : but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day : the night cometh, when no man can work.

When I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay,

And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went away therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

The neighbours therefore, and they which saw him aforetime, that he was a beggar, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

Others said, It is he : others said, No, but he is like him. He said, I am he.

They said therefore unto him, How then were thine eyes opened?

He answered, The man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to Siloam, and wash : so I went away and washed, and I received sight.

And they said unto him, Where is he? He saith, I know not.

They bring to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.

Now it was the sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.

Again therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he received his sight. And he said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.

Some therefore of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, because he keepeth not the sabbath. But others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such signs? And there was a division among them.

They say therefore unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, in that he opened thine eyes? And he said, He is a prophet.

The Jews therefore did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight,

And asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then does he now see?

His parents answered and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:

But how he now seeth, we know not; or who opened his eyes, we know not: ask him; he is of age; he shall speak for himself.

These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man should confess him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.

Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.

So they called a second time the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give glory to God: we know that this man is a sinner.

He therefore answered, Whether he be a sinner, I know not; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

They said therefore unto him, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?

He answered them, I told you even now, and ye

did not hear : wherefore would ye hear it again ? Would ye also become his disciples ?

And they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

We know that God hath spoken unto Moses : but as for this man, we know not whence he is.

The man answered and said unto them, Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he opened mine eyes.

We know that God heareth not sinners : but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth.

Since the world began it was never heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind.

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us ? And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out ; and finding him, he said, Dost thou believe on the Son of God ?

He answered and said, And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him ?

Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee.

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

And Jesus said, For judgment came I into this world, that they which see not may see ; and that they which see may become blind.

Those of the Pharisees which were with him heard these things, and said unto him, Are we also blind ?

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye would have no sin : but now ye say, We see : your sin remaineth.

It is a beautiful story, and we might well spend the rest of the evening talking about it; but our business now is to see how it can be used to prove that miracles really took place. How realistic the account is! We seem almost to witness the astonishment of the people at the cure, the timorous behaviour of the brave man's parents, and the anger of the Jewish Pharisees at finding themselves completely out-reasoned; but the chief point to which I wish to direct your attention is that everything in the chapter turns on the miracle. If you cut out the miracle, you must cut out the chapter. Now, you know that some skeptics say that the gospels were first related or written without any miracles, and that these were inserted afterwards; but this instance shows the impossibility of their theory. Many good stories, jokes, etc., arise from very simple incidents, and each person embellishes them before recounting them again. But you must have the point of the story or the joke there to start with, otherwise it will never be recounted. Now, the miracle is the whole point of this story, and therefore we feel sure that the miracle was in it when first the story was recounted or written. If it be urged that the whole was invented, we cannot help thinking that an author of such dramatic talent would

have preferred to make his fortune in writing plays for the Greek stage. But the idea of invention is altogether so wildly improbable that I am sure you will agree that it is far easier to believe that the man's sight was miraculously restored, though he was born blind (as we are told five times in the chapter).

Let us try the plan of leaving out miracles from the Gospel of St. John, to see if it is possible to arrive at the sort of gospel our skeptical friends would be willing to believe in. The last four verses of the first chapter must go. All of the second chapter, for surely clearing the temple was miraculous. Most of the third, in which Nicodemus allows that Christ worked miracles, and Christ miraculously foretold His crucifixion. Most of the fourth, in which Christ convinces the woman of Samaria by His miraculous knowledge of her life, and the miracle of healing the nobleman's son is related. All of the fifth, the discussion in which turns on a miracle at the beginning. The same with the sixth. The seventh must go, because the discussion turns on the miracle related in the fifth, and so on.

Now, what does all this prove? Why, it proves that St. John wrote this gospel *with the miracles in*; otherwise the divergencies of style and language would have been sure to betray

the man who invented or inserted them afterwards. The same argument applies to the other evangelists, and thus we may feel confident that we have the written testimony of two eye-witnesses, and two friends of eye-witnesses, and the oral testimony of the whole church, that our Saviour, Christ, did indeed work miracles.

The case for miracles will not be seen in all its strength till other skeptics try to explain them away; and when a man doubts the divinity of Christ, we have the right to ask that he should do so, instead of merely railing, for surely any one who refuses to believe such testimony ought to put forward some theory as to how the alleged mistake arose. We have seen how insufficient it is to say that the stories of the miracles are legends, arising from popular love of the marvellous. We must remember that we *have* a series of legends arising in this very way, namely, the stories of Christ's miracles related in the Apocryphal gospels. Now, if the four gospels really were legendary, these Apocryphal gospels would be nearly on a par with them; instead of which Renan says: "These compositions can in no wise be put upon the same footing as the canonical gospels. They are flat and puerile amplifications." While all the miracles related in the canonical

gospels agree in portraying a harmonious character in Christ, those in the Apocryphal gospels would throw Christ's character and motives into a perfect jumble. In fact, they are just such miracles as man would invent, and the most conclusive proof possible that man did not invent the wholly different series of miracles related in the canonical gospels.

Practical people know that the simplest explanation of a matter is generally the true one, and the only simple explanation of the existence of the present miraculous accounts is that Christ, as Lord of nature, could suspend the laws of nature. By insisting so strongly upon the invariable character of the laws of nature, skepticism has rendered at least one great service to Christianity; it has shown that divine power alone could cause the working of miracles. If we believe that Christ worked miracles, we may well believe that it was with reason that He claimed to be the Son of God.

Has the age of miracles passed? Yes, if we consider the abrogating of physical laws only to be miraculous; no, if we allow that the suspension of such laws as we can trace in the moral world be equally miraculous. Have you not found that gratitude is almost an unknown virtue in worldly society? Yet most of those who believe that the Son of God came

down to die for their sins try to do something to show their gratitude to Him. How is it that a virtue not usually displayed is shown by this particular class of beneficiaries? Is it not the miracle of the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts of Christians?

The reporter of a certain paper attended one of Mr. Moody's meetings. After it was over, he said to Mr. Sankey: "Why, how is this? I never saw a lot of people so much moved. Numbers are in tears; numbers seem anxious, and intensely impressed with what they have heard; and yet Mr. Moody is not a particularly good orator, and said nothing to-night that you might not hear from scores of pulpits."

"I can only reply to you," said Mr. Sankey, "that 'the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'"

Is not Mr. Moody's success a miracle, and might not the same be said of many another evangelist? If, through trusting in the blood of the Saviour Jesus Christ, you have received assurance of forgiveness and peace in your own heart, is not that evidence to yourself of a miracle of cleansing performed upon your own soul? And are you not bound to show

the world that the age of miracles is not past, by setting before men the standing miracle of a life given up to the service of your Redeemer? Depend upon it, such an example will be more convincing in our days than ten thousand physical wonders. May God help us to prove to the world that the work of His Holy Spirit is the standing miracle of the present age.

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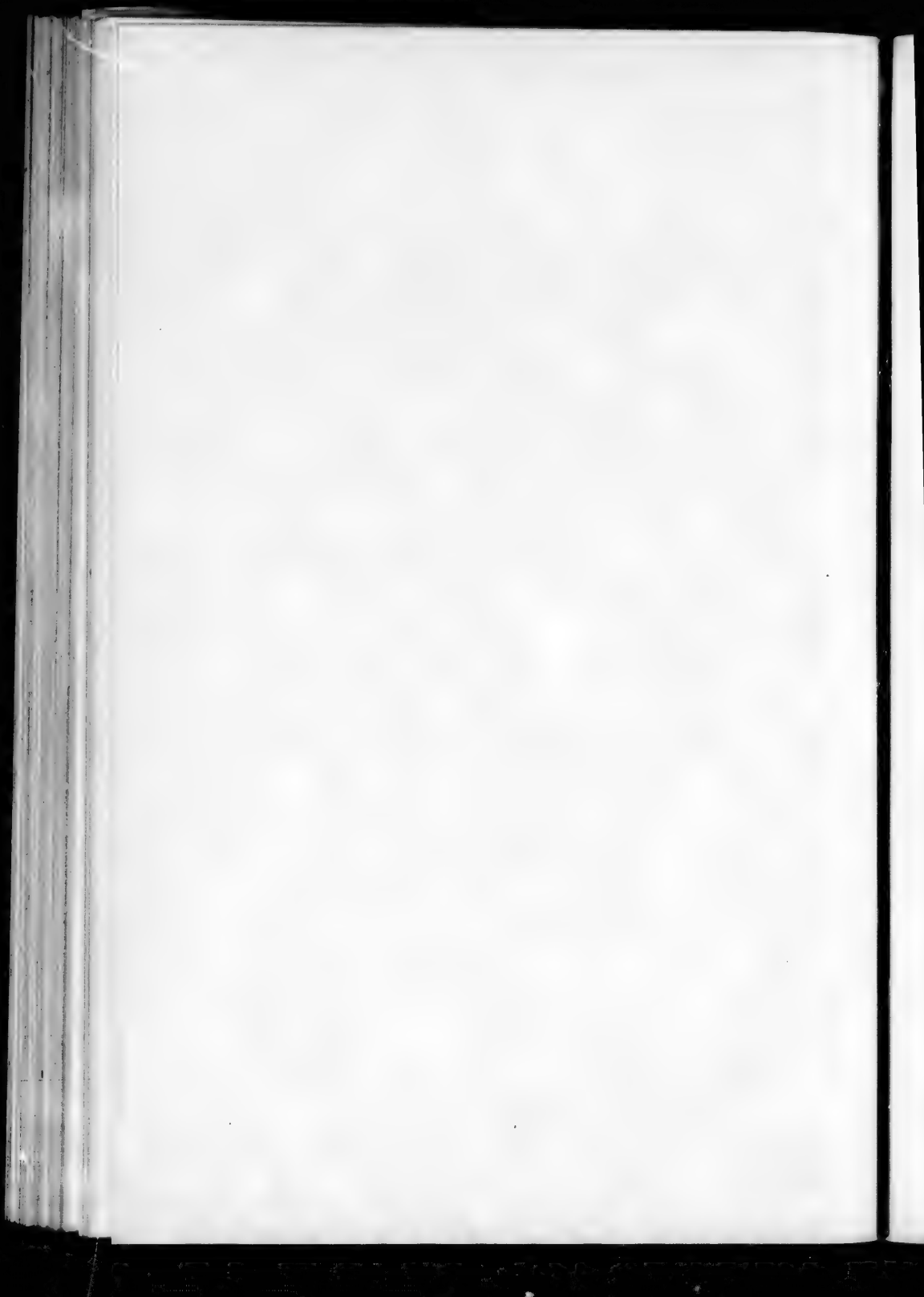


The Credibility of Christianity and the
Difficulties of Disbelief.

ADDRESS NO. V.

The Evidence of the Resurrection.





THE EVIDENCE OF THE RESUR- RECTION.

ALL those who have been in the country for a few weeks in summer are acquainted with the caterpillars which are to be found feeding on all sorts of leaves in the hedgerows and gardens. Many people regard caterpillars as repulsive creatures, and they are certainly somewhat uninteresting, for their sole business seems to be feeding and growing. What a pity it is that few persons actually watch their subsequent history! After passing through various troubles in the shape of casting off the various coats they outgrow, they at last arrive at maturity, and then a wonderful change takes place. They apparently die. Some bury themselves in the ground; others fasten to boughs, or stems of grass; but all change into a nearly lifeless form called the chrysalis. In this form they do not feed, cannot see or hear or move about; but, though to all appearance dead, a most wonderful change is going on within. If the caterpillar was not bitten, during life, by its deadly enemy, the ichneumon fly, then, during this quiescent time, the structure of a beautiful butterfly or moth is being perfected within the

chrysalis shell, and, when all is ready, the butterfly emerges with little wings only about one-tenth of their proper size. The insect places itself so that these wings shall hang downwards, and in one or two hours they attain full size and the butterfly departs to enter upon a life of variety, sunshine, and enjoyment.

What lessons in colouring an artist can draw from a butterfly's wing! The combinations of tints are inimitable, unsurpassable. Sometimes we see fancy pictures of butterflies, but they all come far short of the beauty of the real insects. What is it that produces such a dazzling effect on the wing of such a butterfly as the Peacock? Apparently it is a sort of dust, with which the wings are covered. Viewed under a microscope, these particles of dust become little shields, of regular shapes, overlapping each other like scales on a fish, and each magnificently coloured, some in sober tints, some glittering like rubies, emeralds, or diamonds. Yet this marvellous mosaic expanded ten times in each direction in the short space of two hours! And it was all contained under the homely caterpillar's skin, and prepared for perfection during a period of quiescence resembling death. What a marvel it is! Watch it for yourselves. Understand it, who can? After you have seen the butterfly emerge

from the chrysalis, then answer St. Paul's question: "Why is it judged incredible with you if God doth raise the dead?"* It is not for us to start the inquiry with a preconceived conviction that the resurrection is impossible. Our duty is to examine the evidence, and form our conclusions upon that.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."† When he thus made the resurrection the test fact of Christianity, he showed that he was either inspired, or else endowed with extraordinary practical wisdom; for we now find that there is better evidence for the truth of the resurrection than for any other fact in Scripture; and we may even say than for any other fact in history.

There has been found on a wall at Rome a representation of a man with an ass's head, fixed to a cross, at the base of which a Roman soldier kneels, and underneath are the words: "Alexaminos worships his god." This was undoubtedly drawn to ridicule some Christian soldier for worshipping Christ. Again, Lucian, about 165 or 170, writes: "They," that is, the Christians, "worshipped the crucified sophist, living according to his laws." Thus, apart

* Acts xxvi. 8. † I. Cor. xv. 17.

from the Bible, we have evidence that there were to be found in Rome in A.D. 170 a body of men who worshipped a crucified Jew as God. What possible explanation is there of this fact? Suppose that we grant that the founder of this sect was a very good man and worked miracles, would not his having died as a malefactor have effectually contradicted any claims he advanced to be God? Surely every one would say: "If he was God, why did he allow himself to be put to death?" And this argument would have convinced the most simple-minded that to believe in such a God was folly. For, if he were dead, what would be the use of obeying his laws? Yet we know that this religion spread from Jerusalem to Rome in thirty years, for in Nero's time numbers* of men and women died cruel deaths on account of their faith in Christ. The only way to account for these facts is that the early Christians believed, not in a dead Christ, but in a Christ who had risen from the dead, and therefore claimed their worship, as well as their admiration.

And, without proceeding to the Bible, we have still further evidence that this is the true explanation of how people came to worship a crucified Christ, for Eusebius says: "Our Saviour's resurrection being much talked of

* Tacitus says "a great multitude."

throughout Palestine, Pilate informed the Emperor of it, as likewise of His miracles, of which he had heard; and that, being raised up after He had been put to death, He was already believed by many to be a god." These reports of Pilate are now lost; but that they once existed is evident from the fact that Justin and Tertullian appealed to them, when writing defences of the Christian religion for the perusal of the very people to whom the documents belonged.

So far, we have been reasoning as if the Bible did not exist; but we saw, in the last address, that some books in the Bible are so undoubtedly genuine that we may fairly base arguments upon them. Skeptics agree with Christian critics that the two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, that to the Romans, and that to the Galatians, were written by the man whose work is described in the Acts, and only twenty-five years after Christ's death. Now, a genuine letter is a document of immense value to prove any facts which the writer refers to, as if they were known to the person addressed. For instance, if, at a robbery trial, a letter turns up, signed by Bill Sykes, which runs: "Dear Jim. What did you do with the money that we took out of the safe?"; as soon as that was proved to be a genuine, *bonâ*

fide letter, any jury would convict Jim as well as Bill on the strength of it; because Bill Sykes would never have written to Jim in that way if there was any doubt as to whether Jim assisted at the theft. The only chance for Jim's counsel would be to show that Bill wrote the letter with the intention of deceiving.

Now, there is no evidence whatever to show that St. Paul wrote the above-mentioned letters with the intention of deceiving, and no skeptic alleges that he did; therefore we may be sure that when he alludes to a fact as known to the recipients of the letter, they believed it as well as he. In I. Cor. xv. he appeals to the fact that he had recounted to them all the people who saw Jesus Christ after He was raised. The third verse begins: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also."

Now, Paul was in Corinth only twenty-four years after Christ's death; therefore we may be as certain as that we are now met together that, twenty-four years after a certain most important event happened, St. Paul was publicly saying: "This event was witnessed by more than five hundred people, of whom the greater part are still alive," implying: "You can consult them personally, if you wish." Now, though this epistle was written to a church in which there were four different parties,* yet St. Paul dared to say to it, alluding to what happened on the way to Damascus: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"† thus proving at least that all the parties in the Corinthian church believed in the resurrection.

Again, in the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul says that, at a visit to Jerusalem, "James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship." This proves that these great apostles agreed with the main points of St. Paul's teaching, and it appears from the first verse in Galatians that St. Paul based his teaching on the fact of the resurrection. The fact that St. Peter and St. John firmly believed in the resurrection is also proved by passages in their

* I. Cor. i. 12.

† I. Cor. ix. 1.

own writings,* almost as undisputed by skeptics as those acknowledged epistles of St. Paul from which alone we are now reasoning.

The fourth verse in Romans proves that a church containing a large Jewish element, which St. Paul had not visited, also believed in the resurrection. We say "proves," for what had St. Paul to lose if he made a misstatement? His clear conscience before God—almost the only thing he valued; and if he was detected in a misstatement, he would have forfeited his reputation with the churches he had founded.

Thus we may be perfectly certain that, only twenty-five years after Christ's death, there were a series of churches, spread over a distance of fourteen hundred miles, who all believed that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a fact attested by hundreds of witnesses then living. One of the greatest difficulties of disbelief is to account for this.

So far, we have based our reasoning on the acknowledged letters of St. Paul only, but there is another book into which these four undisputed epistles dovetail with the greatest exactitude. That book is the Acts of the Apostles. It can be shown that the names of places and persons in this book agree exactly

* I. Peter i. 21; Rev. i. 18.

with the epistles. Also that the coincidences occur in such a natural way that it is obvious they were not intended for proofs. Further, it appears that the character of Paul, as depicted in the Acts, is exactly the same as that which appears from the epistles. Now, if the Acts had been written mainly from invention, and at a late date, as some skeptics say, it would have required the utmost skill to so arrange events as to portray a man whose character should be identical with the already existing epistles. For we must remember that nowhere in the Acts does it *say* that Paul was a man of great industry, energy, and perseverance—one who would not be turned aside by any obstacle, and yet a man who longed for sympathy and love; a man of great tact, and of a very versatile mind, and yet very conscientious in what he thought to be right. Nowhere do the Acts *write out* such a description of Paul's character; all these things *come out* in the accounts of his life, and so closely agree with his character as it appears in his letters that we see it would have required the utmost skill to arrange this, if the Acts had been forged at a late date.

Now, if skeptics, when it suits their purpose, make out the early Christians to have been a simple-minded folk who were so ignor-

ant as to be no fit judges of what was going on under their own eyes, and utterly incapable of recording it correctly when they tried—if they make out the early Christians as extremely stupid in some cases, it is scarcely fair to assume that they were extremely clever in other cases; hence we believe that the Acts would not agree so well with the epistles unless it was a true history of facts which had just taken place.

There are hosts of other arguments to prove the Acts to be a true account of what the apostles did. The references to Roman governors, etc., all agree with secular history. The mention of places are all geographically accurate. The several accounts of the same events—as the three accounts of St. Paul's conversion, and two of Peter's preaching to Cornelius—all show marks of being the same story told in different ways, to suit the conditions and respective audiences.

Let me remind you that in the third lecture we noticed a different argument, so strong that it convinced the French skeptic Renan that this book was written by that companion of Paul who says "we" in the last chapter. Let us, therefore, consider it proved that the Acts is, if not inspired, at least a reliable history, and generally accurate. What do we find in

this book? We find that, always and everywhere, the apostles proclaimed the resurrection of Christ as a fact. Only fifty days after the crucifixion, Peter preached, at Jerusalem: "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses."* The same fact is stated twice over before the Sanhedrim†; again to Cornelius; by Paul, at Antioch in Pisidia, at Thessalonica, at Athens; in fact, it comes in almost every sermon of which a tolerably full account is given. Always and everywhere, Christianity was founded upon the resurrection of Christ stated as a fact.

Now, it is inconceivable that this should have been made the basis of the apostles' preaching unless it was a matter of easy proof. Surely the people who were asked to give up so much to become Christians *must* have inquired into the evidences of the main fact on which their faith was to be founded. Surely, if the bulk of those five hundred witnesses of the resurrection were doubtful as to whether what they saw were Christ or not, the apostles would not have dared and could not possibly have succeeded in founding the new faith on this fact.

Howson says: "A conviction of the truth of the resurrection sends a thrill through the

* Acts ii. 32; see also v. 24.

† Acts iv. 10; v. 31.

whole book of the Acts, gives to it life, and expression, and power. Can anything be more incredible than that a mere delusion, a mere sentimental hysteria, should have communicated such nerve to the book, such meaning to all its chapters, such vigour to its words, such strong consistency to the acts it records?"

Thus the evidence is almost overwhelming that there were in Palestine numbers of men who were willing to bear witness that they had seen the risen Christ, although the very fact of being witnesses involved them in great danger. We repeat that the standing difficulty of skepticism will always be to explain how this general belief arose. No infidel deserves a hearing for his theories unless he is willing to advance some explanation of how this happened. And here we may remark that for long ages no adversary of Christianity attempted to advance any theory as to how this belief arose. Why? Because no basis could be found for such a theory.

This summary of arguments—for it is nothing more—is, I fear, very uninteresting; but remember we are talking about the most important fact in history, on which all our own hopes of immortality, and of meeting again those whom we love, must be founded. Hence we cannot but feel extremely loth to omit any

line of argument, no matter how superabundant the proof they all furnish.

So far, we have been reasoning just as if the four gospels did not exist. However, there is no necessity for us to set aside the gospels, as even Renan acknowledges that the three first must have been written but little over forty years after Christ's death, the real date being probably much earlier. In the fourth address we glanced at the overwhelming evidence that the last gospel was really written by St. John. Renan, in the first edition of his "Life of Jesus," confesses himself greatly struck by the incidental indications of authenticity presented by the fourth gospel. He notices the slight traces of precision, the freshness of its reminiscences, "like those of old age," the little touches of detail, etc. Strauss, in the third edition of his "Leben Jesu," makes the confession that, under a renewed study of the fourth gospel, his early doubts of its authenticity and credibility had themselves become doubtful to him. Well, then, may Dr. Wace say: "It is a pure illusion to suppose that there is any general agreement of critical authority against the authenticity of the four documents on which the faith of the church

respecting the life and work of our Lord reposes. On the contrary, the assault has, from first to last, been a wavering one, even under the most daring leaders, and the main positions for which a Christian writer cares to contend are now practically surrendered by the most prominent of our antagonists."*

Now, skeptics are very fond of charging us with assuming the inspiration of Scripture, and then reasoning from that, instead of reasoning up to it, as we ought to do, seeing that it is the very point which we want to prove. To be on the safe side, let us assume that the gospels are not even documents of ordinary credibility, and let us even treat them with more distrust than any ordinary history, and reason on nothing which is not either vouched for by all four evangelists, or else appealed to as a still existent fact when the records were written, or else a matter written down in such a way as to reflect discredit on the writers or their friends, because no one makes out that he himself or his friends behaved foolishly unless a strong regard for truth compels the confession. Then no one can accuse us of assuming the authority of the gospels, for we shall be treating the evangelists more as if they were well-known

* "The Gospel and its Witnesses." Page 36.

liars than men who had no motive to write down aught but truth.

Now, all four evangelists vouch for the fact that the sepulchre in which Jesus was laid was found empty on the third day. What, then, became of the body of Christ? Certainly, the Jewish Pharisees did not remove it, or else they would have produced the remains afterwards, and triumphantly confuted Peter when he claimed, on the day of Pentecost, that Christ had risen from the dead. To remove the body, even temporarily, would have been the most foolish thing the Pharisees could do. That the Pharisees neither removed nor destroyed the body is evident from the fact that they spread the report: "His disciples came by night and stole him away." That this was their explanation of the occurrence we consider proved by Matthew's recording: "This saying was spread abroad among the Jews (and continueth) until this day." (The last clause brings this within the second class of facts which we agree to take on the testimony of the evangelists; besides, Justin Martyr and the pagan Celsus here corroborate Matthew.)

Now, we cannot believe that the Pharisees' explanation is correct, and that the disciples *did* steal away the body; for, if so, it would be impossible to show why they should after-



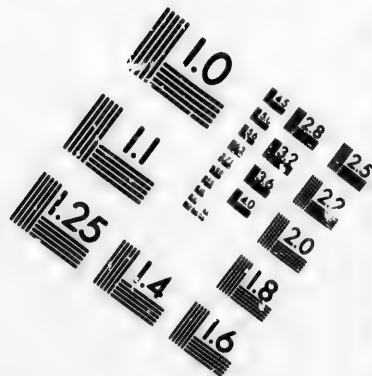
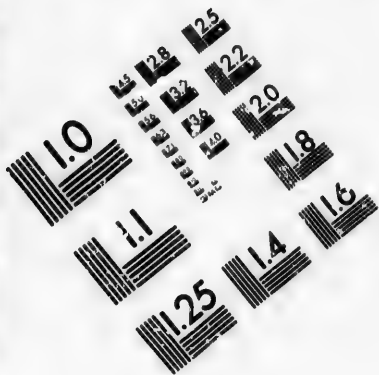
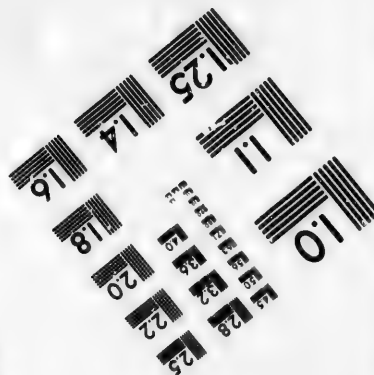
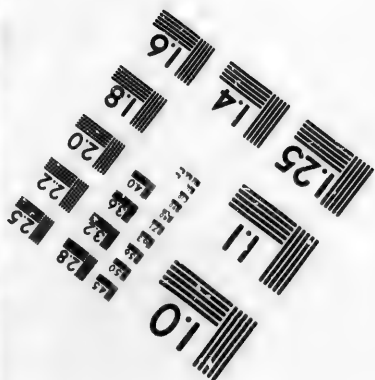
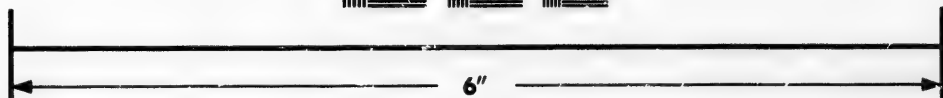
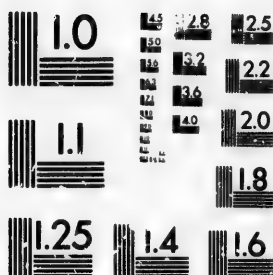


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wards have given up their homes, positions, and lives for what they would then have known to be a fraud. I believe that this explanation is altogether abandoned by skeptical writers; yet its having been advanced at the time by the Jews shows what a real difficulty the disappearance of the body then was, and still is, if we do not believe in the resurrection.

The workingman and ex-skeptic, Cooper, after showing the practical certainty that the Pharisees did take those steps to secure the tomb which Matthew relates, throws a great deal of deserved ridicule on the pharisaic explanation by paraphrasing their subsequent instructions to the soldiers thus: "Say, 'His disciples stole him away while we slept.' Say that you knew what was being done while you were fast asleep! Say that you think the disciples must have stepped on tip-toe, when they removed the stone, for they did it without noise, or it must have awaked you!"

We have seen that neither the friends nor the enemies of Jesus could have removed the body, and we cannot believe that a neutral party hid it, for they must have known afterwards that the Pharisees would have given a large sum for its production. The only alternative is the Christian way of accounting for the empty tomb; namely, that Christ rose from the

dead. Here we come to another great difficulty of disbelief—how to answer the question: What became of the body of Jesus?

Now, we are also going to assume as true any statement which the evangelists make to their own detriment. It is generally admitted that Peter superintended the writing of Mark's gospel. If so, he caused Mark to write: "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he turning about, and, seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men."* Now, no one likes to record a severe, well-merited rebuke which he has received from high authority. We may be perfectly certain, therefore, that this conversation really took place, and that Matthew is correct when he adds Peter's speech: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee."† Thus we see that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ must have been a

* Mark viii. 31. † Matthew xvi. 22.

death-blow to the expectations of the leading apostle.

Again, it is recorded in Mark that "They had disputed one with another in the way, who was the greatest."* For so doing, Christ rebuked them, and the whole story is much to their discredit. No doubt they were disputing who were most fitted to occupy high positions in the earthly kingdom which they were expecting Christ to set up, for up to the last they failed to realize that He came as a suffering Saviour. We can easily understand, then, that it must have been in a tone of deep sadness that the two disciples said to Jesus, on the way to Emmaus: "But we hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel."† It is evident that, up to the very end, they had expected that Christ would set up an earthly kingdom, and their hopes were completely dashed to the ground. Here we come to another difficulty of disbelief; for if Christ did not rise from the dead, how do the skeptics account for the undoubted fact that the disciples *did* take heart and begin the work again, and set up a spiritual kingdom, instead of the earthly kingdom on which their hopes were formerly fixed?

The skeptic Laing lays stress upon the fact

* Mark ix. 34. † Luke xxiv. 21.

that Matthew, almost at the close of his gospel, records: "When they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted."* As this statement was to the discredit of the disciples, we may assume it true; and we have therefore now proved three very important facts:

First, that, when Christ showed Himself to His disciples after He rose from the dead, some doubted.

Second, that they afterwards became so thoroughly and absolutely convinced that their Master had risen from the dead that, abandoning old ideals, they gave up the rest of their lives to preaching that fact.

Third, that there is no reasonable way to account for what became of the body of Jesus, unless He rose from the dead.

The fact that the disciples did not expect Christ to rise again from the dead is an important one, because, as you are doubtless aware, skeptics try to account for the resurrection by saying that the disciples had visions, that they thought they saw a ghost, and that the whole thing was really a mere hallucination. Dr. Carpenter accounts for belief in spiritualism by "mental expectancy, prepossession, and fixed idea." We all know that it is the guest who

* Matt. xxviii. 17.

has been told that, unfortunately, there is no place for him to sleep but the haunted room, and who, though really frightened, laughs at the idea of ghosts, and lies down with his head full of them—he it is who sees the phantoms walking in chains, etc. All the researches of the Psychical Society tend to show that people imagine they see ghosts when they are expecting them. Now, it is clear that the disciples were not expecting to see Jesus again; hence we feel sure that it was no ghost which caused them to believe that Christ rose from the dead. It is seldom that a number of people together imagine that they see a ghost, but all four evangelists agree in stating that the eleven apostles saw the risen Christ at the same time. Ghosts are supposed never to be tangible—that is, to allow themselves to be touched; but three evangelists state that the risen Christ was touched. Also ghosts do not appear in broad daylight, as all four evangelists agree in stating Christ did. The same considerations may be urged with greater force against the idea that the apostles saw visions, and nothing more.

A matter is related by John which is so much to the discredit of one of the apostles, Thomas, that we are entitled to reason from it. (I fancy that no one who reads the Acts can

allege that the apostles purposely discredited or told lies about each other. No traces of such viciousness can be found in their lives or writings.)

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

This is all very derogatory to Thomas. We must therefore assume that the apostles at least believed that it had taken place. We wonder how skeptics account for it. Did the disciples imagine that he said: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe"? Or did Thomas, after publicly declaring this

* John xx. 24-28.

resolution, allow himself to be convinced by a spectre of his own imagination?

Again, all the evangelists agree that Christ spoke to the *assembled* apostles. Now, as apparitions or visions have no material existence, if the apostles were convinced by mere mental illusions, each man must have had a separate and distinct apparition before his mind's eye. How, then, was it that they all imagined the spectres of their respective minds to be all saying the same thing? For, had any one written down what the others did *not* imagine they heard, their remarks would have caused his account to be discredited.

The skeptical contention is just as if, some time in the future, a person was to say: "I allow that a number of people were assembled at St. Paul's Church, Halifax, on the 19th of March, 1893, and that many of them knew by sight the person whom they imagined read an address to them. I allow that what was said was not only discussed, but acted upon, and the import of it subsequently put down in writing. I have never heard of any differences of opinion as to what was said, and I believe that the hearers agreed as to what should be done to carry out the instructions given them; but nevertheless I affirm that the whole thing was a mental delusion, that no visible form

stood before those people, and that no words were spoken in their hearing."

Well might a French savant exclaim: "In truth, I am not credulous enough to be an unbeliever!" To deny the resurrection is as if one should go to-day into the mess-rooms of any of those regiments which, in the Peninsular War, at the battle of Albuera, cleared the hill with the loss of two-thirds of their numbers, and it is as if one should tell the officers there assembled that their predecessors in the regiment were altogether mistaken in imagining that their well-known colonel was with them on that glorious day, and that any human voice gave those words of command that started them in the grand advance against overwhelming odds which changed defeat into victory.* And this illustration altogether comes

* To bring out the force of the illustration, I quote in full Napier's description of this attack, which may be likened to the advance of the Christian church, through the Neronian persecution, up to its victories at the time of Constantine:

"Such a gallant line, issuing from the midst of the smoke, and rapidly separating from the confused and broken multitude, startled the enemy's masses, which were increasing and pressing onwards as to an assured victory; they wavered, hesitated, and, then vomiting forth a storm of fire, hastily endeavoured to enlarge their front, while a fearful discharge of grape from all their artillery whistled through the British ranks . . . The fusilier battalions, struck by the iron tempest, reeled and staggered like sinking ships; but, suddenly and sternly recovering,

short of representing the force of our argument ; for, at the battle of Albuera, the British soldiers, before the order was given, had the will, the weapons, and the skill requisite for the advance, and we have seen that the apostles had none of these essentials till Christ rose from the dead.

Stated briefly, the difficulty of disbelief is to stretch the vision theory sufficiently to

they closed on their terrible enemies, and then was seen with what a strength and majesty the British soldier fights. In vain did Soult with voice and gesture animate his Frenchmen ; in vain did the hardest veterans break from the crowded columns and sacrifice their lives to gain time for the mass to open out on such a fair field ; in vain did the mass itself bear up, and, fiercely striving, fire indiscriminately upon friends and foes, while the horsemen hovering on the flank threatened to charge the advancing line. Nothing could stop that astonishing infantry. No sudden burst of undisciplined valour, no nervous enthusiasm weakened the stability of their order ; their flashing eyes were bent upon the dark columns in their front, their measured tread shook the ground, their dreadful volleys swept away the head of every formation, their deafening shouts overpowered the dissonant cries that broke from all parts of the tumultuous crowd, as slowly, and with a horrid carnage, it was pushed by the incessant vigour of the attack to the farthest edge of the hill. In vain did the French reserves mix with the struggling multitude to sustain the fight ; their efforts only increased the irremediable confusion, and the mighty mass, breaking off like a loosened cliff, went headlong down the steep ; the rain flowed after in streams discoloured with blood, and eighteen hundred unwounded men, the remnant of six thousand unconquerable British soldiers, stood triumphant on the fatal hill ! ”

account for all these things, and to explain how the disheartened apostles came to believe that they had a mission to regenerate the world, and were changed from lambs into lions.

In examining the Christian evidences hitherto, we have not paused to examine many of the cavils with which skeptics endeavour to obscure the real issue; but, as we are now on a subject of the utmost importance, it is necessary to answer some of the objections which are urged against the accounts of the resurrection.

At one time it was supposed that Christ did not really die. This theory having been practically given up by skeptics, we need waste no further time over it.*

*The old theory was that Christ did not really die, but was laid in the tomb in a swoon; that He then recovered of His wound, arose from the tomb, showed Himself to the disciples, told them that He was risen from the dead, and, after spending a short time with them, retired into the strictest seclusion to hide Himself from His enemies.

Skeptics urge that the gospels allow that Christ's body was delivered into the hands of His friends, and thus all this became possible. But if they claim that the accounts are true in this particular, they ought to allow that the fact which goes before is also probably true. Before giving the body over it is related that Pilate called for an official report from the centurion, who certified to him that Christ was actually dead.

Also, John states that he saw blood and water flow from

And we may well be content to accept Renan's verdict that "our best guarantee is the suspicious hatred of the enemies of Jesus." Renan says: "At all events, they must have made certain that he was actually dead."*

It is stated by the Rev. P. P. Biddulph that Lord Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West, Esq., both men of acknowledged talents, had imbibed the principles of infidelity from a superficial view of the scriptures. Fully persuaded that the Bible was an imposture, they were determined to expose the cheat. Lord Lyttelton chose the conversion of Paul, and

the Saviour's side when it was pierced by the spear. This was because the bag containing serum (the liquid in which the heart beats) was pierced. This always causes death.

But, apart from the statements of individual gospels, the theory that Christ did not really die is an utterly impossible one. All four gospels show that He suffered extremely, not only on the cross, but beforehand. In what state of exhaustion, therefore, would He have been in when He first crept from the grave? Everybody in Jerusalem was either a friend or a bitter enemy. From whom did He get the wherewithal to break His long fast? No friend who saw Him in this state of exhaustion would have imagined that He had risen from the dead by supernatural power. And most certainly the fact of His extreme exhaustion when first seen would become known to all the disciples. And if He had died of exhaustion, surely this would have finally terminated Christianity; while, if He had lived in seclusion, surely the apostles would not have dared to preach the resurrection, lest their Master should be searched for and finally executed.

* Page 353.

Mr. West the resurrection of Christ, for the subject of hostile criticism. Both sat down to their respective tasks full of prejudice; but the results of their separate attempts was that they were both converted by their efforts to overthrow the truth of Christianity. Their able inquiries have furnished two of the most valuable treatises in favour of revelation. Gilbert West wrote his "Observations on the Resurrection of Christ" in 1749, and in it he gave an "order of events" which reconciled the statements of all the evangelists. This became a standard work, and is constantly quoted in books on the Christian evidences.

Yet Laing, writing a few years ago, states: "St. Luke, again, in his Gospel and Acts, amplifies the miraculous appearances almost up to the extent described by St. Paul, though with considerable differences both of addition and omission. The three women became a number of women; the one angel or young man in shining clothes, two; the appearance to the women disappears; Peter is mentioned as running to the sepulchre, but departing without seeing anything special except that the body had been removed."*

Now, over a century before, Gilbert West had reconciled all these little discrepancies by

* "Modern Science and Modern Thought." Page 137.

showing that probably the women visited the sepulchre in two parties, one of which saw one angel inside, the other two angels outside the sepulchre; and that Peter visited the sepulchre twice, going in the first time, but only looking for the angels the second time. Surely, after such a natural explanation had been published, Laing ought not to have again brought forward such trivial objections, saying that the accounts were "hopelessly inconsistent."* No wonder he thinks them inconsistent when he construes a silence about the ascension on the part of Matthew, Mark, and John into a statement "that the final parting of Jesus from his disciples took place there,"† that is, in Galilee, for just before he says the disciples "went to Galilee in obedience to a command to that effect."

Laing also says: "It is to be noted that all St. Luke's miracles are expressly stated to have occurred at Jerusalem, where Jesus had commanded his disciples to remain, and are therefore in direct contradiction with the statements of Matthew and Mark, that whatever occurred was in Galilee, where the disciples were expressly enjoined to go."‡ These objec-

* "Modern Thought." Page 138. † Page 139.

‡ Pages 137, 138: When Laing states: "Luke distinctly says that 'He commanded them that they should not depart from

tions disappear when we remember that people like some notice before starting on a long journey, and that there was doubtless plenty of time for Jesus to show Himself to the disciples before they were ready to go to Galilee. The forty days which we believe to have elapsed between the resurrection and the ascension allow ample time for all to return again from Galilee to Jerusalem, seeing the distance was only ninety miles. As for the so-called "direct contradiction" involved in the fact that Jesus had commanded His disciples to remain at Jerusalem, it is merely necessary to point out that this command immediately precedes two verses describing the ascension. The apostles received it, and obeyed it, after their return from Galilee.

Renan, in endeavouring to explain away the resurrection, says: "We may say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalene here enacted a principal part. Divine power of love, sacred moments in which the passion of a hallucinated woman gives to the world a resurrected God." We may add, and starts a band of downcast country people, headed by a cowardly fisherman, to found a society on that hallucination which, progressing through

Jerusalem,' and describes them as remaining there and witnessing a number of appearances," he grossly misrepresents Scripture.

all sorts of difficulties and persecutions, at last dominated the civilized world. That Renan misstated the case when he said that it was *Mary's* imagination which gave to the world a resurrected God is evident from St. Paul's writing: "That he (Christ) appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once . . . then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also."*

Laing copies Strauss in making out that St. Paul "places all the appearances on the same footing as that to himself, which was clearly of the nature of a vision, or strong internal impression."† Does making a category of events necessarily "put them all on the same footing"? and was the appearance to St. Paul only a vision or strong internal impression? On the contrary, St. Paul, in speaking to his enemies afterwards, appealed to the fact that "they that were with me beheld indeed the light,"‡ and to Agrippa he said: "And when we were *all* fallen to the earth," and in the first account we are told that *all* heard the voice (margin, "sound"), though the

* I. Cor. xv. 5, 6, 7, 8.

† "Modern Thought." Page 133.

‡ Acts xxii. 9.

second account shows that they could not distinguish the words.

Objections are raised as to how Christ could have been clad when He left the tomb. We who believe that He possessed the power of creating bread, and even sight in a man born blind, need find no difficulty in this. In fact, all the objections based on the nature of Christ's risen body are only difficulties when the miraculous is denied.

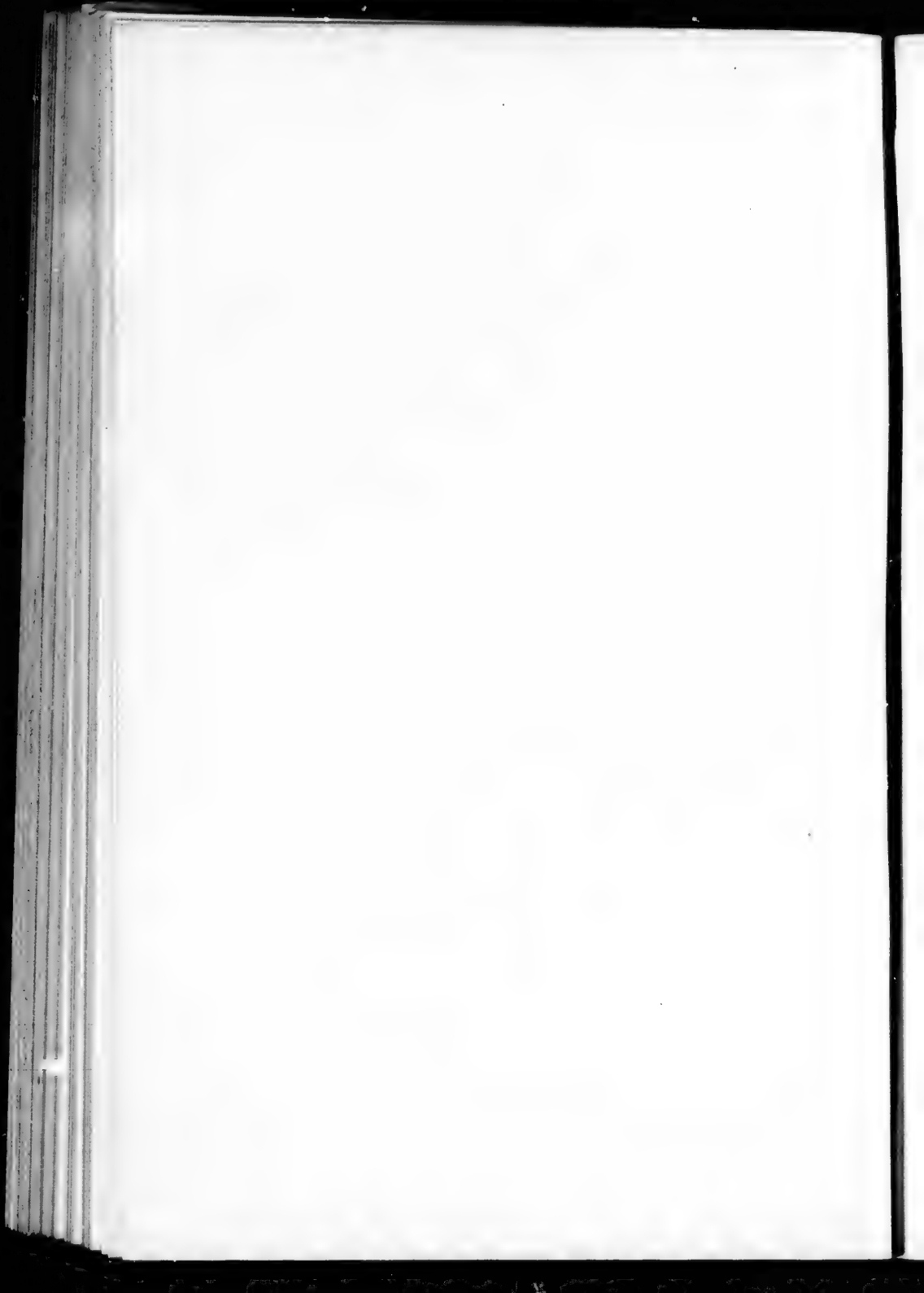
When our opponents criticize the details of the Gospel narratives, we become entitled to draw from these details further proofs of the reality of the resurrection, and directly we examine the narratives we see how utterly inadequate the "vision" theory is to explain them; for how does this theory account for the fact that Mary should first imagine Jesus to be the gardener, and the two disciples on the way to Emmaus take Him for a stranger? And if they were only under a hallucination due to the excitement of their minds, how could it be kept up during a long walk and discussion in broad daylight? And how was it that Peter's plunge into the Sea of Galilee did not drive all feverish dreams out of his head? And how did they come to imagine that a vision ate before them? The proofs of Christ's resurrection are indeed weighty, but

thousands have been convinced of the fact without any of the reasons we have been considering. How? By experience of the living Christ becoming a personal friend to them. And thousands who have never found a friend in Jesus have nevertheless acknowledged that He still lives, when they have watched His influence moulding the characters and directing the lives of those who are united to Him. But how can we be united to Jesus and have Him for a friend? You remember that, when the party reached Emmaus, Jesus "made as though he would go further."* Why? Doubtless because He did not wish to be an uninvited guest. And the whole tenor of Scripture shows us that, just as no one is compelled to believe, so no one can expect to receive pardon and eternal life through union with Christ unless they invite the Saviour to take up His abode in their hearts.

Do not imagine that because Christ rose from the dead you will necessarily be a participator in His resurrection. When science taught that energy is never wasted, people drew thence a strong argument for immortality, concluding that, when a wise man dies, all that he has acquired during life could not be wasted and lost. When speaking of this subject we

* Luke xxiv. 28.

saw that, in a mechanical sense, there is a conservation of energy—that is, it is theoretically possible to make machines which do not waste power, and nature does not unnecessarily waste her powers; but that, nevertheless, scientific opinion has now come round to the belief that, practically, in some of its changes of form, energy can be dissipated and lost. For instance, when water is poured over a water-wheel, there need be very little waste of power; but when it passes down a waterfall, a great deal of energy is dissipated. The course of humanity is often likened to a continually flowing river, and the analogy of nature teaches us that if a man directs the course of his life aright, and in view of the eternity beyond, then, when death precipitates him into that eternity, very little of what knowledge and good habits he has acquired on earth need be wasted; but if his life has been allowed to drift with the main current towards selfish ends, then, when the catastrophe comes, even that which is good in him may be almost or altogether lost.





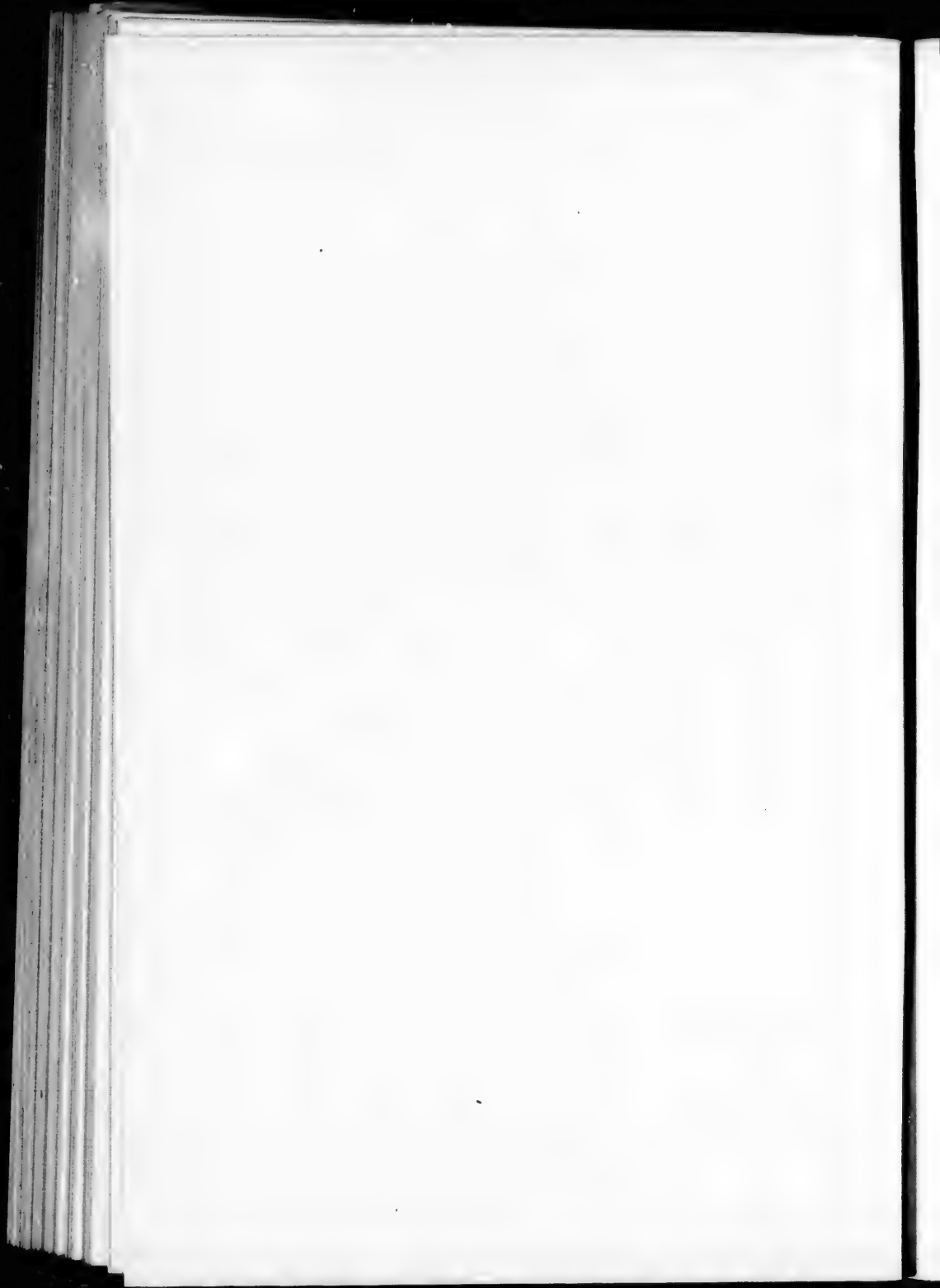
The Credibility of Christianity and the
Difficulties of Disbelief.



ADDRESS NO. V.

The Proof of the Truth of Christianity
Drawn from the Character of Christ.





THE PROOF OF THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY DRAWN FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

AS our subject for this address is an exceedingly wide one, we must keep strictly to the question, Was Jesus of Nazareth a mere man, or more than a man? For evidence to help us solve this most important of all questions from considerations of character, we can only go to the accounts of Christ's life contained in our four gospels. But, as we have not absolutely proved that the gospels were written by the men whose names they bear, or that they are accurate records, is it right and fair to reason from them? It is certainly fair to contemplate the general picture of Christ's life which they open before us. Having done so, we may ask the question, Is this a picture drawn from real life, or from the imagination? If we become satisfied that the picture was drawn from real life, without the help of the imagination, then we may be certain that the original was more perfect than the picture, and that, though details may be wrongly represented, their being so damages instead of heightening

the effect. Clever artists often use models to assist their imagination, but students in art are only able to produce beautiful pictures when they copy their original faithfully. How, then, can we tell by which method the beautiful result was attained? Whether by giving the imagination full play, or by carefully copying a beautiful model?

One way of deciding this question is by looking to see whether or not the subject has been idealized, by a rounding off of angles and a softening of hard lines; if so, we feel certain that imagination has been given way to. But a far more certain method is to set a second artist to depict the same subject. If he gives his imagination play, we are perfectly certain that he will not produce a similar picture, let alone a corresponding picture. If the pictures do correspond in most points, we infer that they were faithfully copied from the model (and we know that no matter how faithfully the artists copy, there will be minor disagreements).

If we set a third artist to depict the same subject, and he produces a corresponding picture, then our conviction that all have faithfully copied the model is confirmed. But if we set a fourth to depict the subject under somewhat different circumstances, say, when

the light is coming from another direction, and if he produces a picture whose only differences from the others are evidently caused by the different light, then we should be absolutely sure that all had faithfully copied the original. Now, the Almighty has caused the character of Jesus Christ to be portrayed by four evangelists, and we have not the slightest reason to believe that any of these men used their imagination in describing the character of their Master. Skeptics say that they did draw upon their imagination in ascribing miracles to Him, but we are unaware that any skeptic alleges that they used their imagination to improve upon His character. And skeptics wisely refrain from so doing, for it is evident that the evangelists were not clever enough to depict an invented character, or we should have to believe that they were all greater geniuses than Shakespeare; and again, before Christ came, no men had lived upon earth who were sufficiently good to fire the imagination of the evangelists. For an artist cannot depict one beautiful feature, even from his imagination, unless he has formerly seen its prototype somewhere.

It has been well said: "Imagination has again and again attempted at least to conceive and depict a character absolutely stainless, and

yet, in the whole range of the world's poetry and fiction, has never attempted to do so without hopeless failure if it descended for a moment into details. Could the peasants of Galilee have invented the sole perfect ideal which the world has been able either to imagine or describe?"

Again, when we examine the gospels, we find that the subject has not been idealized, the angles have not been rounded off, nor the hard lines softened. Where do the evangelists indulge in panegyrics of Christ? Did not the Pharisees find His character to be very angular? Are the hard and firm lines of His teaching ever softened down?

But, again, do not the three first evangelists, looking at Jesus in the light of a Galilæan philanthropist, produce an exactly corresponding picture of Him? And does not John, depicting Jesus as a controversialist at Jerusalem, produce a picture of which the only differences from the others are due to the different light beating in on the character of Jesus; namely, opposition instead of docile following?

Therefore we are sure that the evangelists did not draw upon their imaginations, but at least tried to portray Jesus faithfully. Which of their statements, then, may we fairly argue

from? We reply, those statements which go to build up the picture, and which are such a necessary part of that picture that we feel they cannot be inventions any more than the whole picture is.

For instance, we perhaps ought not to take Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" standing alone, as a proof that He was sinless; but we say that His innocence is proved by the lifelike picture-story of the trials, because the story then turns on that fact, and must have been all invented if that be not a fact; and so skeptics agree with Christians that the trials took place as the evangelists relate them. Before we proceed further, let us make a few quotations to show that, so far, skeptics agree with us.

Mr. Parker says: "Shall we be told such a man never lived? the whole story is a lie? Suppose that Plato and Newton never lived. But who did their wonders and thought their thoughts? It takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? None but a Jesus."

J. S. Mill said that "It would not be easy, even now, even for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour

so to live that Christ would approve our life."*

Renan says: "This foundation was truly the personal work of Jesus."† "Jesus will never be surpassed."‡ "Let us, then, place the person of Jesus on the highest summit of human grandeur."§

Thus we see that even skeptics allow that the picture of Jesus presented in the gospels is that of a grand and wonderful character, raised far above the characters of all other good men. How can we believe that myths and legends, the inventions of many men, would have succeeded in building up this harmonious whole?||

The fact that the Jewish prophets failed to describe the character of Jesus correctly weakened the argument from prophecy, but here it comes to our assistance, because it makes us feel certain that the recorders of Christ's character had no model before them from which to copy it except Christ Himself. In this way, therefore, we are entitled to reason from the gospels; but, as Bushnell says: "We do not assume the truth of the narrative by which the manner and facts of the life of Jesus are reported to us; for this, by the sup-

* "Essays on Theism." Page 255.

† "Life of Jesus"; page 367. ‡ Page 376. § Page 368.

|| In short, why does not the familiar old proverb about "too many cooks" apply in this case?

position, is the matter in question. We only assume the representations themselves as being just what they are, and discover their necessary truth in the transcendent, wondrously self-evident picture of divine excellence and beauty exhibited in them."*

How overwhelming is the very idea of attempting to point out a few of the excellencies of Christ's character! Nevertheless, as that character is the very consummation of the Christian system, so is it the main rock upon which our faith is founded, and it cannot, therefore, be left out of a series of addresses on the Christian evidences. When we contemplate the character of a mere man, even though it be as complex, with as many points of excellence, as the Apostle Paul, we can all agree about the main characteristics. We say that he was wonderfully determined and zealous, and yet a man of quick sympathies, and longing for sympathy from others. We agree that Paul was extremely conscientious, and yet so large-minded that he could make himself all things to all men. We see that he was a man of powerful intellect, and yet sufficiently humble to acknowledge that he could not comprehend all God's dealings with men. All these things we can agree upon as the main characteristics

* "The Character of Jesus." Page 11.

of Paul, but neither believer nor unbeliever can agree about the main points of the character of Christ. Why? Because there are no main points. That character is so marvellously complete and rounded off that we cannot agree as to what shall be considered its peculiar excellence.

Yet, if there be any trait in human characteristics which is lawful and right, and which any one of us specially admires, that trait we are sure to find carried to perfection in Christ; and not only so, but probably coupled with some other good trait which we generally regard as its opposite, as far as virtues can be opposite to each other. For instance, we find that Christ's character, as portrayed in the gospels, couples incessant diligence with easy accessibility. Though He was always busily engaged in good works, He never rebuffed those who interrupted Him to crave His help. (Even in the case of the Syro-Phœnician woman, the blessing was first refused only that it might be ultimately wrought more speedily.)

Again, we see zeal combined with prudence and discretion. When a man is very zealous, we are always afraid of his running into unwarrantable extremes, and the fear is generally justified by after events.

Again, we see elevation of mind coupled

with simplicity of manner. Low living together with high thinking is an ideal every right-thinking person since Christ's time has striven after. But how few begin to attain it!

Then we see ineffable purity, coupled with forgiving pity; in other words, the most pointed rebukes for the incorrigible, proceeding from the same lips as, on other occasions, uttered words of pardon and compassion for repentant sinners.

Then we see power coupled with gentleness. The same form which on one occasion cleared the vast temple area, on another is seen blessing little children.

Similarly, dignity went with condescension. The man whose bearing awed Pilate, at another time concentrated all His powers on enlightening one despised Samaritan woman.

Again, the gospels depict a character of solitary greatness, which, nevertheless, was raised and made sacred by familiarity. Experience teaches us that "no *man* is a hero to his own valet."

Passing to more mental attributes, we find that Jesus possessed both reasoning power and intuitive perceptions. The man before whose logic scribes and Pharisees could not stand perceived at once when a lawyer came whose mind was more open to conviction. Now,

generally, people who trust to their logic leave their intuitive faculties undeveloped, and *vice versa*.

Also, the capacity for showing sympathy was combined with the profoundest wisdom. Here, again, men generally fail, because the more we take thought for others the less time remains for acquiring wisdom. For the same reason, tenderness does not usually go with steadfast decision, as the latter attitude of mind can only be maintained by constant attention to one object. Yet the raiser of Jairus' daughter was also the rebuker of Peter.

Neither is humility often coupled with severe indignation. Yet the same man who washed the disciples' feet also said to the Pharisees: "Ye serpents! Ye generation of vipers!"

Courage implies self-reliance, and therefore is not often found with dependence upon others. Yet the same man who "steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem" lived in such dependence upon God that the busier He was, the more necessary He found it to spend time in prayer.

Dr. Stalker has well pointed out* that Christ combined capacities which are not often found in the same man. Thus He could both

* "Imago Christi."

work and suffer. He was a great preacher and a great teacher. He was a great controversialist, and yet a man of intense feeling. How can words ever convey an idea of the virtues, qualities of mind, and capabilities for active work which went to make up the character of Christ?

Now, it is not contended that these virtues are essentially Christian—that is, that they are never found among those who have not believed in Christ. On the contrary, some men exhibited one or more of these good qualities in a high degree even before Christ came, and we may candidly acknowledge that some modern skeptics do so also. But it is contended that the combinations, or pairs, of virtues are never found in a high degree in the same man unless he has attained them by sedulously copying Christ as his pattern. Christ's character, then, was the only one which the world has ever seen in which the virtues were perfectly balanced. None carried too far, and yet nothing wanting.

In Christ we find :

Earnestness without austerity.

Self-denial without severity.

Fortitude without rashness.

Constancy without obstinacy.

Humility without meanness.

Dignity without pride.

Tender benevolence without weakness.

Exalted piety without enthusiasm.*

Napoleon said, at St. Helena: "I know men, and I tell you that Jesus is not a man. Everything in Him amazes me. His spirit outreaches mine, and His will confounds me. Comparison is impossible between Him and any other being in the world. He is truly a being by Himself. His ideas and sentiments; the truth that He announces; His manner of convincing, are all beyond humanity and the natural order of things. His birth, and the story of His life; the profoundness of His doctrine, which overturns all difficulties, and is their most complete solution; His Gospel; the singularity of His mysterious being; His appearance; His empire; His progress through all centuries and kingdoms—all this is to me a prodigy, an unfathomable mystery."

"From first to last," said the great Napoleon on another occasion, "Jesus is the same; always the same—majestic and simple, infinitely severe and infinitely gentle. Throughout a life passed under the public eye, He never gives occasion to find fault. The prudence of His conduct compels our admiration

* McGilvray on "The Evidences."

by its union of force and gentleness. Alike in speech and action, He is enlightened, consistent, and calm. Sublimity is said to be an attribute of divinity. What name, then, shall we give Him in whose character was united every element of the sublime? " *

We shall only have time to consider in detail one of these combinations of contrasting virtues in Christ's character. Let us, then, see how the Gospel records describe Him as combining courageous decision with considerate love. Many of the incidents we shall use in this inquiry are inseparably connected with miracle; but, inasmuch as we are establishing a number of separate and distinct proofs of Christ's divinity, we do not wish to base this proof on either of the former ones, and therefore we will not assume that the miracles were really performed. We only say: These episodes show Christ to have possessed certain characteristics, and we have already seen how impossible it is to suppose that the evangelists were four very clever men, who agreed to invent certain episodes which would impute those

* Liddon, in "The Divinity of Our Lord," page 150, gives a list of authorities for this and similar sayings of Napoleon.

characteristics to Christ. We may be told that we ought not to reason from these episodes because the miracles are inseparably interwoven with them. We reply: We admit that the miracles are inseparably interwoven with these occurrences, and we consider that to get the miracles out of these episodes is one of the difficulties of disbelief. *We* believe that they ought to be left in.

We do not regard courage as a great virtue by itself, and apart from the end sought after. Thus we do not think that the man who crosses Niagara on a tight rope exhibits a very high class of courage, because the end he has in view—namely, money—dishonours his exhibition of the virtue. But if a man plunges in off a steamer to save a child we all admire his courage, because we all agree that it was directed to worthy ends. The courage of Jesus Christ was directed to the most noble end possible, the salvation of the world. He showed it in the storms on the Sea of Galilee; in the presence of the mad, raving demoniacs; in the presence of the officers sent to take Him; and in the presence of a crafty hierarchy bent on His destruction.

He showed it when death stared Him in the face. With what noble indignation He said to the high priest's minions: "Are ye

come out as against a robber, with swords and staves to seize me?"* and He showed it when He said, on the way to Calvary: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me!"† He showed it before the chief priests, Herod and Pilate, when His self-possession was so complete that, though treating all accusations with silent contempt, He missed no opportunity of testifying to the great truth of His divinity.

But this may be called passive courage. It is generally considered that the bravest troops are those who can stand fire without replying; but, lest any should demur to this, we would say that Christ showed the highest form of active courage.

What active courage our Saviour showed on the two occasions when He cleared the temple! Think of the great throng of traffickers whose desecration of the sacred precincts had been sanctioned by long unchallenged possession. One man, armed with a scourge of small cords, drove them all out, braving alike the goads of the cattlemen and the taunts of those who might say He sought opportunity to gather up the scattered coins. The disciples do not claim to have assisted in any way at these great cleansings, but seem to have rivalled the Pharisees in their aston-

* Mark xiv. 48. † Luke xxiii. 28.

ishment at their gentle Master suddenly showing such wrathful indignation.

What a lot of courage it takes to go against public opinion! Indeed, unless there are a few to sympathize, no men will undertake to do so. Perhaps we should except those experts in arts and sciences who feel that they know more than the public whose opinion they brave; for instance, Galileo, Paisley, Stephenson. Jesus went dead against public opinion again and again. Public opinion said that a religious teacher should not associate with those who might be ceremonially unclean. Jesus sat at meat with publicans and sinners.* Public opinion insisted upon a minute observation of the sabbatical rules of the scribes. To do deeds of mercy, Jesus transgressed these wretched rules, even when He knew that His enemies were watching Him. Confronted with the scribes in the synagogue, we read: "But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man that had his hand withered, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. And Jesus said unto them, I ask you, Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to destroy it? And he looked round about on them all, and said unto him, Stretch forth thy hand. And

* Matt. ix. 10.

he did so: and his hand was restored. But they were filled with madness; and communed with one another what they might do to Jesus."* Did not the Saviour show great courage upon this occasion?

Again, public opinion was that all the Jews were enjoying God's favour. Christ contradicted it by saying: "I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish."†

Again, public opinion was that the Jewish nation alone were regarded with any favour by God. Christ publicly pointed out, in the synagogue at Nazareth, that Elijah's and Elisha's greatest miracles were wrought to succour outsiders, thereby making the people so furious that they took steps to kill Him that day.

When customs exist which are dear to those who formulate public opinion, it is particularly hard to decry them. No doubt the Pharisees relished the facility for divorce, obtained by a stretching of the Mosaic code, and they must certainly have been furious when Christ dared to say: "Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath

* Luke vi. 8, *et seq.* See also xiii. 14, xiv. 1, etc.

† Luke xiii. 3.

not been so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery."* And no doubt the Pharisees found it very convenient to avoid the obligation to support their aged parents, and were correspondingly angry with Christ when He said to them: "Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition. Ye hypocrites!"†

At last we come to the final terrible denunciation of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Whether any of them dared to hear it out may be doubted, but they seem to have been present when Jesus began to speak.‡ It was certainly delivered in their stronghold, the temple at Jerusalem, and among a populace favourable to their rule, as was so fatally shown in the trial before Pilate. Christ used scathing language on this occasion. Perhaps, in the course of the world's history, a ruling class may have sometimes been denounced in fiercer invectives, but never with only their righteousness to support them, as was the case on this occasion. An anarchist, now, may get up and hurl accusations against his government, but he probably has a great deal of sympathy from

* Matt. xix. 8, 9. † Matt. xv. 6.

‡ Matt. xxii. 46; xxiii. 1. Mark xii. 38. Luke xx. 44, 45.

his class to support him, and knows that the just laws he denounces will not allow of his life paying the forfeit of his words.

But we have no reason to believe that, in the time of Jesus, public opinion had even begun to formulate itself against the hypocrisies of the priestly class, and Jesus knew that His enemies sought His life, for He had been living away from Jerusalem for some time to preserve it.* If used only when necessary, vehement language requires no justification unless it oversteps the bounds of truth. Skeptics have not shown that Christ was the least unfair to the Pharisees on this occasion. Renan quotes His words at length, practically applauding such "vigorous eloquence."† Considering the occasion, Christ's words were temperate, but it is hard for us to realize how bold they were. This episode alone would stamp Him as a courageous man, but it is only one of the many occasions when He showed this virtue.

First, to set before men a perfect example, and then to redeem mankind by His own death upon the cross, was the object which our Saviour followed with the most steadfast determination throughout His ministry. For this reason He refused to be set up as a temporal

* John vii. 1. † "Life of Jesus," Page 296.

king,* though, humanly speaking, it must have appeared as if His ends could be much more easily reached in that way; and, even when danger was most imminent, He refused an asylum among those Greeks who took an interest in His person and teaching. For this reason He endured all the discomforts of a wandering and precarious life,† and at last steadfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem,‡ knowing well that it was full of unscrupulous men who sought His destruction. §

The people thought Christ was Elijah returned to life again. Elijah's main characteristic was determined courage, and this mistake of the Jews shows us in what light Jesus' character appeared to them. Christ's teaching reflects the determination of His character. He taught His disciples: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."|| No man who was not himself so acting would have dared to insist on such a maxim. Again, He taught His disciples to persevere in spite of all opposition, even from the lawful authorities.¶

All this is important, because Renan implies that Jesus lived a sort of idyllic, pastoral life in Galilee, and subsequently changed His objects

* John vi. 15.

† Luke ix. 58.

‡ Luke ix. 51.

§ John xi. 8.

|| Luke ix. 62.

¶ Luke xii. 11.

and His methods. Renan says: "We must also recollect that in this impure and oppressive city of Jerusalem Jesus was no longer himself. His conscience—by the fault of men, and not by his own—had lost something of its primitive clearness. Desperate, pushed to extremities, he no longer retained possession of himself."* Thus Renan implies that Jesus allowed Himself to be put to death to relieve the tension of an intolerable situation. It is impossible to believe that a mere man would have so acted if he foresaw the end in time to escape it. Yet Renan, speaking of the last journey up to Jerusalem, allows that "Already, on various occasions, he had spoken to them of his future sufferings, and they had listened unwillingly. Jesus finally broke the silence, and, no longer concealing his presentiments, he spoke to them openly of his approaching end." If the gospels be at all reliable, we cannot doubt that Jesus foresaw the end from almost the beginning of His ministry, and that He prepared for it with steady determination, manifesting the same character in Jerusalem as among His friends in Galilee.

Surely the weight of such a stupendous mission; the sense of such gigantic opposition;

* "Life of Jesus." Pages 303, 304.

the mere presentiment only of such a terrible tragedy to come, would have overwhelmed the mind of any mere man, and caused him to be entirely preoccupied with his own work in a manner which could not be described as selfish egotism in such unprecedented circumstances. Yet Christ showed the most considerate and compassionate love to others throughout His earthly course. Especially was this the case at the end, when we should have expected Him to have been entirely absorbed in His own terrible sufferings.

Christ's considerate and compassionate love was shown in the performance of each and all of the miracles related in the canonical gospels. (We cannot too often insist on the fact that these characteristics do not appear in the legendary miracles of the apocryphal gospels.) However, as we are not to assume the miracles, we will not argue from the love shown by the actual healing, but from the minor thoughtful kindnesses which the evangelists agree in recording. In raising Jairus' daughter, why did Jesus allow the parents to be present, while excluding the bulk of the disciples, whom it would have been apparently more important to impress? Was it not out of kindly consideration for their feelings? And did He not take the child by the hand that she might have

support and feel among friends when her senses returned?*

In restoring sight to the blind, our Saviour showed the same consideration. On one occasion† we are told that "He took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village"; when he was thus removed from scenes of excitement, his sight was gradually restored. Similarly, the man born blind was sent to a pool outside Jerusalem, where his sight was slowly obtained as the clay was washed away.

Christ's deeds of mercy were often accompanied by words of love which doubled their value. Thus, immediately after the messenger had brought Jairus the sad news of his daughter's death, Jesus said to him: "Fear not, only believe."‡ To the widow of Nain He said, with the deepest compassion: "Weep not."§ And the true sympathy with which those words were spoken is evident from the story of the raising of Lazarus, when we are told that the Saviour's feelings overflowed in tears.

The love of Christ's heart is also manifested to us in His teaching; for instance, when

* Mark v. 40.

† Mark viii. 23.

‡ Mark v. 36.

§ Luke vii. 13.

He commanded His disciples to bid the poor to their feasts ; and also in the parables. The story of the good Samaritan exhibited practical love ; the prodigal son, paternal love ; the ninety and nine sheep, pastoral love ; while the illustration of a man giving good gifts to his children exemplified the love of God.

The most terrible bodily sufferings could not prevent Jesus taking thought for others. While He hung upon the cross, He provided for the welfare of His sorrowing mother by consigning her to the care of the loved apostle John. While the air was full of the taunts of His enemies, He could distinguish one voice which uttered words from a repentant, believing heart. Immediately He gave the dying thief the fullest assurance of his acceptance, prefacing His words with that "verily" with which He enforced the most important truths, showing him that he was immediately forgiven, and giving him the strongest possible assurance of happiness in the unseen world which he was so soon to enter.

We are certain that, in Jesus of Nazareth, courageous decision was blended with considerate love.

I have selected these three virtues—decision, courage, and love—for detailed con-

sideration because they go with truthfulness, and necessitate truthfulness in the person who exemplifies them.

To act with steadfast decision through life is to be true to an ideal. Christ acted with steadfast decision through life, as we have seen. We say that He was certainly true to His ideal.

The moral courage which Christ showed can only accompany truthfulness.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive!"

wrote Scott. No man who is conscious of deceiving will dare the things which Christ did.

At Suakim, in 1885, the Arabs used to attack us at all times, and from all directions. One night they passed right round the camps and attacked the ordnance store depot in the rear. Men who had seen them fight would only advance into the desert with the utmost caution, expecting an Arab to spring out at them from behind every mimosa bush. So experience teaches us that the results of untruthfulness dog our footsteps, and may at any time spring up to overwhelm us. Had Christ been an accomplice after the fact in the raising of

Lazarus, would He have dared to subsequently denounce the ruling classes in their stronghold? After playing the hypocrite, could He have denounced hypocrisy? We cannot believe it. Even had He been devoid of noble feelings, fear of the consequences alone would have deterred Him. Lazarus or his sisters might have revealed the fact. The deception might have come to light in a hundred ways. Let the deceiver hide himself, lest he be covered with shame. But Christ knew that He had raised Lazarus at Bethany; therefore His noble courage in the temple at Jerusalem.

Finally, love cannot abide untruthfulness, for to deceive a person is usually the most unkind thing you can do to him. What do we think of a family where deception is practised? We say that love has departed from it. Even Renan acknowledges that Jesus died for the human race. With what possible motive? On account of His great love for mankind. We will not believe that He purposely deceived us.

"What is truth?" said jesting Pilate, and would not wait for an answer, for he considered that the riddle insoluble to his philosophers must be beyond the comprehension of the

despised Galilæan before him. Why are the Bible-reading nations of the earth the most truthful? Is it not because they have learnt from Jesus Christ to speak the truth? The falseness of Indian natives is proverbial, and I am unaware that contact with Englishmen cures their habit of lying. But contact with Christ will. My brother in India wrote to me about a native catechist: "I have never found him doing or saying anything in the least shady as regards truth or honesty." That man had learnt of Christ, who, we believe, was "the way, the TRUTH, and the life."

Therefore the only remaining question for us is: What did Christ say about Himself? What did He claim to be?

Christ made both direct and indirect claims to be more than a man. If we could discover sufficient motive for the fraud, it would be conceivable that the evangelists should have agreed to insert the direct claims, but we cannot imagine such guileless men inventing the indirect claims. We shall notice that often either sort amounts to a claim to divinity.

The best of men freely acknowledge their own imperfections. Speaking generally, the better the man the more he feels the need for repentance. Christ never showed the slightest signs

of contrition. Are we to infer from that that the denouncer of all hypocrisies was Himself an arch hypocrite? No. We feel sure that He never felt the sense of personal sin. Yet His nature was a very sensitive one, and He undoubtedly knew what was right. If He had fallen short in any way, we feel instinctively that the sense of guilt would have been as overwhelming as the sense of shame which made Him stoop down and write on the ground when the Pharisees confronted Him with the woman taken in sin. Christ's prayer in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel could never have been conceived, far less uttered or written.

But, laying aside St. John's Gospel, which is so full of proofs of the divinity of Jesus Christ that we cannot touch upon them, let us consider Christ's words in the three first gospels. What did He mean when He said: "Come unto me"?* Could any mere man, no matter how good, have used these words? Put them into Gordon's or Wesley's mouth, and see how they sound. Intolerable. Why did Jesus, trained in the strictest school of Jewish monotheism, assume the unprecedented right of pronouncing sins to be forgiven?† Was He justified in promising a reward to

* Matt. xi. 28. † Luke vii. 48. Matt. ix. 2.

"whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink, because ye are Christ's"?* These, and other passages,† can only be explained by allowing that Christ claimed to be more than human.

Christ praised Peter for saying: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."‡ Was not this a direct claim to divinity? Again, He frequently implied that He was to be the judge of the world,§ and He coupled His own name with that of God the Father in such a way that He either blasphemed, or claimed to be the Son of God.|| • We cannot logically stop short with the admission that Jesus of Nazareth was only a very good man. If He was not what He claimed to be, He was a deceiver and an arch hypocrite.

Even Renan¶ writes: "His title of Son of God, which he openly avowed in vivid parables," instancing the householder who sent his son to the husbandmen.**

Finally, let us always remember that it was the assumption of this title, Son of God, which caused Jesus to be condemned by the high

* Mark ix. 41. † Matt. xii. 6. Luke x. 24.

‡ Matt. xvi. 16, 17. § Matt. vii. 21-23. Luke xxi. 36.

|| Mark xiii. 32. Matt. xxviii. 19; xi. 27. Luke x. 22.

¶ Page 299. ** Matt. xxi. 37.

priest. Jesus knew that it would be so; for, before making the claim, He said: "If I tell you, ye will not believe."* The Jews expected a Messiah. Had they ruled that any man claiming to be that Messiah was guilty of blasphemy, they would have dashed to the ground their own hopes. It is clear, therefore, that Luke gives the fullest account of this part of the trial, and that after Christ had claimed to be the Messiah a second question was put to Him: "Art thou then the Son of God?" † to which He replied: "Ye say it, because I am," ‡ leading to His instant condemnation.

Is this accounted for by merely saying that Jesus was a fanatic? Since His time numbers of men have been found willing to sacrifice their lives for His sake, but surely they have had strong reason to believe that His promises to them of a future reward would be fulfilled. If Christ were a mere man, with what motive did He, under such appalling circumstances, make such an awful claim? Self-deception? Idiots and ignorant men may be self-deceived; Christ was neither. Fanaticism? Wise men may be fanatics, but they become so only to advance their own interests, like Mahomet, Brigham Young, or the Mahdi.

* Luke xxii. 67. † Luke xxii. 70.

‡ Marginal reading of Revised Version.

I am unaware that any skeptical "Life of Jesus" has been published in England or America. Why not? Because English-speaking people are firmly convinced that Jesus was one who spoke the truth, and that He claimed to be more than a man. To refute one of these two propositions is the greatest difficulty of disbelief.

How natural does the crowning miracle of the resurrection now appear to us! Was it not God the Father's endorsement to His Son's work and words? Should we not, then, pay earnest heed to Christ's words? He told us that He came "to give his life a ransom for many."* "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

What think ye of Christ?

* Mark x. 45.